THE KING'S GOOSE

WORKS BY

ALFRED TRESIDDER SHEPPARD

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Alfred Tresidder Sheppard

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ALFRED TRESIDDER SHEPPARD

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TO MY WIFE
DOREEN TRESIDDER SHEPPARD
THIS BOOK
in which she has taken so much interest, and in the preparation of which she has given me so much help,
IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED

S31K

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"He who eats the King's goose must give back the feathers even a hundred years after."

OLD FRENCH PROVERB.

THE AUTHOR'S APOLOGY FOR HIS BOOK

AT the high tea which Mrs. Thornburgh arranged at Long Whindale Vicarage, in her anxiety to see Robert Elsmere comfortably married, Rose Leyburn gave Dr. Baker permission to tell his one and only ghost-story. "We won't interrupt you," she promised, "unless you put in too many inventions."

"You invite me to break the first law of story-telling, Miss Rose," said the doctor, lifting a finger at her. "Every man is bound to leave a story better than he found it."

Here is an old tale; the first impulse to re-tell it, but with a difference, came to me nine years or so ago in a Florentine library while glancing through a book by the erudite Dr. Doran; it was he who sent me, a few months later, to the National Library in Paris, and a few years later still to the Blésois and Touraine. How far I have succeeded in obeying Dr. Baker's "first law" is for others to decide, but it is at least fair that my debt to earlier writers should be acknowledged, and especially to Dr. Doran and to Paul La Croix ("The Bibliophile Jacob") whose now forgotten novel, "Les Deux Fous," has as its central figures Diane of Poitiers, Francis I, and the younger Caillette, my hero. La Croix, whose fascinating books on the by-ways of French history are well-known to students, was one of the regiment of collaborators employed by Alexandre Dumas, but his own adventure in fiction lacks the magic touch by which Dumas transformed the dry bones collected by himself and others into living flesh and blood. Interesting as his novel is, and with a magnificent plot to work upon, he has, I think, just fallen short of complete success by being too stiff, too archaic, too rhapsodical, and, alas, not infrequently a little dull.

There is, perhaps, another justification for using as the foundation of a new novel part of the construction of an old and neglected book. It has become the fashion

to take historical characters out of the cupboards of memory and prejudice now and then for inspection and spring-cleaning. Diane of Poitiers has been scrubbed into a virginal whiteness by certain modern writers, notably by the Editor of her correspondence with Henri II, and, more recently, by Jehanne d'Orliac in "Diane de Poitiers, Grant' Sénéchalle de Normandie." After a careful examination of innumerable books, both in French and in English, I think the only verdict as to her relationship with Francis I, at the time of St. Vallier's arrest and condemnation, must be "Not Proven." It is far harder to believe that her friendship with Henri II was merely platonic and protective. Catherine de'Medici certainly did not think so, and Diane, who in later life at least was admittedly cold, hard, bigoted, grasping and selfish, feathered her many nests remarkably well on the proceeds of her long intimacy with the King.

The two Caillettes are nebulous figures, but the younger, like Triboulet, has his niche in the encyclopædias. Victor Hugo's Triboulet is, of course, not to be taken seriously. I have ventured to make the elder Caillette's death accidental; the old story being that he hanged himself intentionally, at the time of the christening at Moulins, in chagrin at Triboulet's victory in a contest of wits.

As far as possible, I have kept to the main outlines of history, and have endeavoured to give a true picture of the times and those who played their parts in them. But "many inventions" in an historical novel dealing with a faded past and folk long dead are inevitable. I hope there will not be too many Rose Leyburns or Dr. Bakers of to-day to lift fingers at me in protest or reproach!

ALFRED TRESIDDER SHEPPARD.

Bruges.
1931.

CHAPTER I

GOD'S SPY

"We'll take upon us the mystery of things
As if we were God's spies."

AS YOU LIKE IT.

IF you search diligently at Loches, among the grotesques and emblems, the crockets and tarasques and corbels and drees and gargoyles, you may find at last bending precariously over space a Jester in cap and hood, who keeps unchanging watch on the world below. He is God's spy over whom the birds and the free clouds pass unheeded, while he peers down through the ages, with perhaps the faintest smile, half cynical, half pitying—as Zeus might smile from high Olympus—for mortals playing their petty parts against the changing tapestries of the years. Those stone eyes, fixed and inscrutable, have watched so much which stone lips may not tell. They have seen joys and merry-makes, predicaments and feasts, trumpets and banners, ferocities and terrors, loves and deaths. They have seen Kings come and Kings go, courtiers make obeisance to the monarch towards whose grey courts all wend, captives find last enlargement, girls lose roses and gold, stout men-at-arms yield up their strength and whisper surrender. The day and the sculptor are long dead that set him in his place. It was before Trinqueau, the Justes, Regnault, Averneau, Goujon. It was before Ostis, Triboulet, Brusquet, Briandas, Chicot, the Caillettes. For nearly five centuries the nameless Fool of Loches must have looked down—through dancing summer heats and winter snows and rains—through starred nights and mists and blackness—through the cock-crows of thousands of dawns, the curfews of thousands of sunsets—upon the habitations and generations of men.

How many strutting antics, so gay, so busy and intent on ends they knew not, are gone like the painted moths of the heath, the darting dragon-flies of Indre and Loire and Cher, the autumn leaves of Loches wood-

lands! The stone eyes watched all, and the stone lips keep inviolate their secrets.

From the castle roof at Loches the Fool of Loches must have seen Diane in the freshness of her beauty; saw her, perhaps, in those long years of power and then disillusion, resisting fretfully Time the thief, and riding hither from Chenonceaux, from Chaumont, from Anet, so that age and death might be laughed at, and youth and loveliness be kept immortal. He saw Guise, Navarre, Bourbons, the sans-culottes; and a day when the sarcophagus that had hidden Diane's defeat was turned into a feeding-trough for swine, and the ashes of long-ago beauty—once ah! so fresh and rare—were tossed under that other stone at St. Lain, where you may read—

"O voyageur, arrête un peu ici et mèdite
Cette Diane qui etait puissante par sa race et ses richesses
Est maintenant enfermeé sous ce marbre froid."

He saw Napoleon and his legions come and go: that stone Fool who perhaps looked down, on a hot summer day when good King Louis was King, at France Caillette coming with his father into Loches. . . . There was a poet once who, reading his own heart, wrote:

"Fades the rose: the year grows old;
The tale is told;
Youth doth depart—
Only stays the heart.
Ah no! If stays the heart,
Youth can ne'er depart,
Nor the sweet tale be told—
Never the rose fade, nor the year grow old."

But the stone Jester at Loches bends from his tower wall over the world, and watches, and perhaps smiles faintly, though the stone lips have nothing to say.

This, then, is the story as it may have been of France Caillette, King Francis' Fool, and of Diane whom he loved long ago.

Fool: "The sweet and bitter fool
Will presently appear."
KING LEAR, ACT I, SC. *IV.*

§ I

LIKE snails great and small, with baggage for houses on their backs, Papa Caillette and France crept along the road to Bléré, and Lisette ran alongside on her gilded chain. As far back as France could remember, their life had been a journey, but a journey of cattle tied to a stake, who graze in a circle beyond the circumference of which they may not go; a journey of apes on a leash called Necessity. Very often Papa Caillette would grumble, when times were hard—as they were generally—and only a few whites in the purse lay between them and starvation, that next week they would take the road to Paris, where people swarmed like bees on honey-comb, and players were so important that they even made Kings and Popes of their own. Any fool in Paris, he said, could have a fortune for the mere picking up. But next week never came. Once, indeed, they had wandered as far as the sea, and France could not rub out (nor ever wanted to) the sight of a gallant ship with sainted beasts on her sail, on blue water, under blue sky, beyond coarse grass and yellow sand-dunes. At an inn that night a drunken sailor sold him Lisette literally for a song. Oh, if he could drag up the stake or cut the rope or snap the chain that tethered them all!

Their journeyings lay about Touraine and Anjou, the Blésois and Berri, sometimes just into Poitou—never far beyond. It was a fine land, to be sure, with a biggish town here and there, like a plum in a pudding, but for the most part with little scattered villages on river banks, or among vineyards, or in woods. He had been in so many of these, and they were so much alike, that he mixed up the names. Some were pretty names or quaint: Bracieux, Valençay, Vallières, Cellettes, Les Noels, Tour-en-Sologne, Montrésor, St. Martin-le-Beau, Villeromain. Once he had amused an idle hour by stringing a score of them in a jingle as one strings beads in a necklace on a knotted crown. He liked pretty

names, pretty words, beautiful things, while the ugly, though, to be sure, it had its own odd fascination, put him all on an edge as if someone were scratching slate with nails. Why could not all be beautiful, and nothing ugly and loathsome at all? The skies were never ugly, those carpets and marbled pavements on the other side of which walked God with His long white beard, and Our Lady carrying little Jesus in her arms (just as any country girl might carry her baby) and their Graces the Holy Apostles, and their Lordships the Saints. The rivers with their sandy islands and green deeps and crystal shallows were not ugly, nor the vine-clad slopes, nor the great forests through the glades of which they so often wandered and under the tall trees of which they slept and made their meal.

France knew all about their Heavenly Lordships and Ladyships—but with a queerly muddled knowledge—from the churches in the towns and hamlets they passed through. These were his lesson books and picture books, full of lessons and pictures in stone and glass, iron and wood. When his father lay late in his heavy, snoring slumbers France often spent an hour in some village church, or the cathedral, if it was a city. All the history of man from Creation to Last Judgment, and the future worlds of woe or bliss, were set out in painted windows, on frescoed walls, in fretted stone, in carven wood, in metal screens and doors. His own mind, taking in all, groping for explanations of all, was a jumble of coloured, grotesque, morbid, and beautiful things, like one of the innumerable churches where he muttered—eyes and thoughts wandering—Paternosters and Aves for the parents of St. Julian, Saint of Wanderers. France remembered one picture of God, in a blue doublet and hose, taking Eve out of Adam's side, and another of Adam and Eve at the fatal tree round which the serpent, with a woman's face, was coiled among enormous apples; devils incited the pair to eat. Then there were the animals entering the Ark, two by two, and two cats walked demurely at the tails of two mice, and a dog fox and vixen behind a cock and hen. On a wall he had seen, in faded blues and greens and vermilions and golds, pictures of the marriage feast at

Cana in Galilee; a great Eastern King, whose name, "Zoel," was on a scroll over his crown, was giving the feast; and the guests, besides Jesus, were all familiar; Adam and Eve sitting on a heap of leaves, Cain on a plough, Abel on an inverted milk-pail, Isaac on a little altar, and Job very angry indeed because he had to sit on a dung-hill. Herodias amused them with her dancing, and Mambres performed feats of magic in the background. So they had entertainers even as long ago as that. Another fresco showed the three shepherds, with long staves and their hats hanging by strings behind them, following the Star—their sheep-dog leading the way. And another he remembered particularly, of Susanna and the Elders in the garden, because a little grey monkey like Lisette peeped from the branches of a pomegranate.

From all these, and much more, France had soaked in knowledge. The churches were armouries of strange weapons, wardrobes of gay garments, havens of tall flagged ships and curved fishing boats, menageries of strange beasts doing strange and wonderful things. He knew, of course, that the artists often must have smiled or grinned, and sometimes laughed aloud, when they dipped their brushes in the paint, or chipped the stone, or sharpened their knives. Pigs in the real world did not spin; foxes did not dress like monks and preach sermons with cocks for clerks; geese were not shod by smiths; fish did not roast larks at a fire, nor hares hunt wolves, nor monkeys on horseback ride in tournaments; though certainly Lisette had been on horseback and donkeyback more than once.

But there were very terrible and ugly things, as well as only comic and grotesque; often at night he would lie awake and shudder when he thought of them, and for comfort would bury his face in Lisette's soft fur. These were certainly not to be laughed at; after all, they belonged to another world, a nightmare world, which no one could see, and there were so many of them everywhere in the churches that *some* must be true. Hideous creatures with double rows of sharp teeth ate tiny human beings. Satan, girdled with flames, had eyes set in his bat-wings to show that he, like God Himself,

could see you everywhere, and what you were doing, so that there was no dodging him if you did wrong, as he hoped you would. If you ate the tiniest piece of meat on a fast in the dark he would know all about it, however innocent you might look. There were shaggy devils with horns and hairy tails; little flabby round devils with four legs and extra arms stuck on here and there; devils with claws like great crabs; devils with prick-ears, blunt ears, faces of apes, faces of lions; devils shaped like lizards; devils with long noses, with enormous beaks, with snouts; but the most frightening were those like the men you saw on the road and in the market-places, shaven or bearded; human, and yet not human, because there was something blankly malignant and cruel and cold in the faces from which the artists had emptied the souls so cunningly. These devils had bat-wings, and claws, and held fearsome weapons as they thrust little quaking sinners into the wide jaws of hell.

Once France was locked in a church for hours, and he never forgot how the faces all seemed to come alive, and press round him and gibber at him until the shrieks he could not keep back brought a kindly old white-haired and toothless priest to his help, who patted him, and babbled something about the good God. He was too frightened already to fear the flogging his father gave him for being late.

Papa Caillette himself did not need to darken church doors to see horrors and grotesques. He saw too many without that, for this land they travelled in was a land of very potent wines, which interested him much more than holy water. Not one of the seven stages of drunkenness but he knew very well. The boy, older than his years, was experienced in the symptoms of them all. When Charles Caillette was sick, garrulous, amorous (which they called "goat-drunk") he was tolerable, if unpleasant. When he was crafty in drink, or "fox-drunk," it turned sometimes, but not always, to their advantage on the road. "Sleep-drunk" did not matter; he would lie stertorously wherever you dragged or rolled him. But "martin-drunk" was bad; he would brag and swagger then no matter what com-

pany he was in, and France would have hard work to pick him out of quarrels. "Lion-drunk" was worst of all. Then Papa Caillette was a dangerous fellow to be in the way of, striking out blindly at anyone, very noisy and truculent, brutal and beastly and destructive, and quite unmanageable. It was best at such times to get out of his way. France had had terrible troubles with him. At night, sometimes, his father would start up suddenly, catch his arm in a frightful grip, point at shadows, and rave wildly about horrors. He saw snakes of many colours, wolves and wild boars, creatures with eyes all over them which glared at him, huge savage dogs with several heads, and fanged devils breathing fire. He would tremble all over like one in an ague, and perhaps, of a sudden, lay about him frantically with anything that came to hand, in a mad frenzy, so that one had to be very nimble to get out of his way.

The boy's quick brown eyes watched his father's moods as sailors watch a brewing storm. Often and often France had slipped water stealthily into a flask nearing the lees, or tipped a bottle as if by accident on to the inn floor, when he knew there was not a sou left to buy another. They had been flung out of inns times without number. They had been basted by hostesses (though as a rule France, with his bright smile and winning ways, could wheedle these into good humour), beaten by testy bagmen, cursed by churchmen, snapped at by dogs, kicked by choleric soldiery. They had had to make their peace with sergeants and lords.

France had known no other life, unless one counts dim memories for knowledge. He had, it is true, the haziest remembrance of a very beautiful lady—and very young—who had once been gentle and loving to him, and there had been a room with texts painted on a wall, and a picture of Princes and Kings in crowns playing cards. One night there had been dancing candle-light in this room, and men and women making strange shadows; and the lady was in bed, and kissed him, and gave him—something—but Papa had afterwards taken it away. Then all went out in a blur again. It was a large room, at an inn, he thought; but now they could never afford the best room, and often had to sleep with

servants and labourers and dogs in sand or rushes. But then Jesus, when he was a very little boy, had slept with oxen, and with donkeys.

Other women, frowsy and not very young or beautiful or kind, had entered and passed out of his life. He had known hunger, cold, weariness, harsh words, many, many beatings; a kind word and a spell of brief prosperity now and then. Well, one must take one's world as one finds it. He forgave easily, and was even proud of his father in a way, old rascal though he was. When Charles Caillette was "goat-drunk" he was generous. When he was only "ape-drunk" or "fox-drunk" he was, oh, very amusing sometimes, in a mischievous or simple-crafty way, and could keep people in a roar, and, being pleased at his success and the coins this brought them in, he would perhaps be quite amiable and garrulous, and even uncomfortably affectionate, until the next flask of mousseux was finished.

§2

They had really done very well at Amboise. Madame the Countess of Angoulême was there, living very gaily with her bevy of gay and lovely ladies, and the rest of the household granted her by the King, when his daughter and her son were betrothed. At Amboise she had fifteen gentlemen, twelve ladies and maids in waiting, seventy-eight officials, officers, guards and pages. Scandal said that since her husband's death she fell in love with some new officer almost every month, changing her martial lovers just as a guard is changed, but with less ceremony. The Caillettes and Lisette gave their show in the courtyard of the Ste. Barbe, which was on the Loire bank between the two bridges; the yard was full of soldiers, serving-men, peasants, and boatmen from the river quays. There were round eyes and round mouths at the balancing feats and jugglings and gymnastics. If Papa stumbled or rolled over now and then it only added to the fun; his audience thought it was in his part. Lisette's tricks and grimaces and vicious little rushes at the foremost spectators—which kept them at a respectful distance, and sometimes made them start back in real or simulated fear—went down

very well indeed. So did Papa Caillette's jokes and rude horseplay, and France's piped sallies and gibes. In tight-fitting, spangled green he danced, turned summersets, tied his lissom body into tangles and knots. It was he who took the fish from the basket of an unsuspecting, open-mouthed fisherman and slipped it into the poche of a fat countrywoman, to her intense discomfiture when Papa accused her of the theft. Near the end they were trying a new dialogue; Charles Caillette was a Paris Professor, in sad-coloured gown and enormous horn-rimmed spectacles, and France a pert and unruly pupil, who always got the better of the master. Lisette, in an absurd little dress with a long train and hanging sleeves and a great feathered headdress, was supposed to be the Professor's mistress; certainly no termagent ever behaved better—or worse. Topicalities were introduced. The Italians, and the Pope, who had set himself against King Louis, came in for some shrewd hits, and even the King himself for a little friendly chaff, but he was so good-natured that he would have chuckled if he had been there. The monstrous new Paris fashions they were trying now to imitate in Touraine gave Papa Caillette a text for many coarse jokes and suggestive mimicries; the audience roared and roared again till tears were in their eyes. At the height of the merriment two gentlemen and their groom, who had been riding by the inn, stayed to watch and listen. The younger of the gentlemen was a tall youth most magnificently dressed in slashed silk and velvet, with a great ruby in his cap, below which was a short-cut fringe of fair hair, and riding boots of fine white Spanish leather embroidered in red and gold. He was half a dozen years or so older than France Caillette, and had the longest nose for a lad France had ever seen in his life. It was on the tip of France's tongue to poke fun at it. The crowd in the courtyard were very respectful to the newcomers. When France said something about the French being ass-drivers but the Papal troops asses (there had been a skirmish not long before, and someone had dubbed the French ass-drivers because, when they had routed Pope Julius's men, they packed the spoils on donkey-back and in ass-drawn carts)

the young gentleman laughed, and applauded, and then flung France a gold angelot—no less; though the gentleman who rode with him, much older and looking very austere, protested against such extravagance.

Well, it was lucky France had not let his tongue run away with him, and say rude things about that immensely long nose. This gold angelot was a little fortune. It meant beds and dinners. It meant nuts and ribbons for Lisette, and some of those pretty little gilded bells for her caps which France had noticed in one of the booths near the river. It meant that his father that evening would be in high good humour as long as he remained even moderately sober. And of course it meant good wine, which was less harmful than cheap and bad wine; not that France wanted or would have much of it, for his father often cautioned him with maudlin tears against indulgence, and saved the boy from temptation by drinking all himself.

The gentlemen and the groom rode on, and someone said that the youth, who must have been about sixteen, was son of the Countess of Angoulême and the late Count, and that the grave, stern gentleman who rode with him was his tutor, Autus Gouffier, Sieur de Boisy; though, to be sure, he was already of an age to do as he pleased. Papa Caillette whispered huskily to France as they put together their things that their fortune was made; this fine young gentleman, whom the King had already made Duke of Valois, might come to the throne one day. Before the night was very old Papa Caillette was as drunk as ten lords; though not too drunk to hiccough out boasts of their high patronage and glorious future. On the morrow they would try their fortune at the Château.

§3

Alas! Man may propose, but the god of vine and laurel and pine-cone had always a hand in the disposition of Charles Caillette's fortunes. When morning came he snored in the arms of Bacchus; not a pretty sight, with his vast ears, nose like a red button, wide open mouth, low brow slightly pitted with small-pox, two days' grey stubble on the receding chin, and hairy

chest heaving with each troubled breath. France wandered about the town with Lisette. He bought the nuts and ribbons and half a dozen gilded bells, watched anglers on the river-bank, and spent an hour looking at the goldsmiths and silversmiths at their work. He rather envied the apprentices in their yellow smocks as they mixed lampblack and lead for their masters' delicate niello work, or pumiced briskly with damp stone, or prepared wax and clay to hold the molten metals, or beat out silver or gold on snarling-iron and anvil. It was very interesting to watch them. In one workshop a good-natured master-craftsman, seeing the boy's gleaming eyes, beckoned him within and flung aside a flannel covering a golden napkin-box he had just finished for the Countess of Angoulême. The gold, he explained, was of the standard of the touch of Paris, and he told France of the strict laws governing the crafts—six of the more discreet goldsmiths went about superintending the alloy, and any fraudulent work was soon detected and its maker heavily punished. Some of the silversmiths had been sent to prison for palming off tin subtly coated with silver for real silver. If any article of copper or latten were gilded or plated with silver, part of the meaner metal had to be left exposed. This box had Cupids all round it, linked with sprays of roses, and in the centre the Angoulême arms. It was to be sent up to the Château that morning, because in the afternoon the Countess and her two children were going to Loches, to wait for King Louis, who was expected there from Tours on the morrow. There had been a great Council at Tours, which had decided that the King might fight Pope Julius without sin. Another pretty thing the Countess had ordered at the same time; a case to hold playing cards, in silver and blue enamel, blue and silver being her colours. On this was the crest of a running stag, which somehow France seemed to have seen before. No, said the goldsmith, it was not the Countess's crest, but a certain Charles Monsieur sometimes used it. He said this with a wry smile and a wink at one of the craftsmen, who grinned. "Charles Monsieur" was a queer name; why not "Monsieur Charles," thought France, who smiled and looked wise.

He asked questions about apprenticeship to the crafts and was told that those lads who worked in precious metals and jewels were on a different footing altogether from the common apprentices; a clockmaker, now, which was a skilled craft, might have an apprentice of twenty years of age, while a baker's boy had learnt all he could know at fifteen.

Now there was money to spend his father elected to stay on at the hostelry of Ste. Barbe; they dined there. The elder Caillette, very yellow about the gills, picked at his food and ate little, washing down that little with long draughts of Vouvray wine. It was all a dazzle and quiver of heat in Amboise streets. While Papa slumbered after the meal, with a purple handkerchief over his head to keep off flies, France went down to the river. He was just in time to see the Countess, her daughter Marguerite, the young Duchess d'Alençon, and the long-nosed lad who had stopped his horse to watch the show, leave the Château on their way to Loches. A splendid meinie of guards and ladies and servants went with them. The young Prince, looking very gallant, rode by his mother's litter. Her eyes followed his every movement with pride and doting affection. Once, when his horse stumbled against a stone, she gave a small cry of alarm. She had auburn hair, a sharp chin, and though beautiful seemed to France less so than the countryside reported. The young Princess, who was dressed plainly in a black habit, with silver embroidery, and frilled at the neck, had a very lofty and noble carriage; she had black hair, very white skin, but was not handsome; her face was too broad for that. For a moment as they passed France caught her glance —the eyes were a clear grey, imperious and commanding, yet also mischievous: she had a strong nose, full lips, and good teeth. She was now about seventeen and had just been married to the Duke d'Alençon, whom, it was rumoured, she despised, and did not get on with any too well. King Henry the Seventh of England had once asked for her hand, but the Council of France had refused its consent; the boy was of course ignorant of all this.

For a brief moment the eyes of Marguerite of Angoulême rested on the little wandering player, not unkindly;

ladies often flung him a careless yet friendly glance, and more than once (though he paid slight heed to it) he had heard one say to a companion: "What a pretty boy! How well he carries himself—like a little lord! What fine eyes he has!" She turned away. Her brother did not notice him at all, but spurred his horse to carry some message from his mother to an officer, gaily clad and plumed, who rode at the head of the procession.

France hurried to the inn to tell his father what he had seen. How splendid to be one of these great folk —the young Prince best of all—and dwell in palaces, and wear fine clothes, and have jewels and costly prettinesses, and so much money that one need only go into any shop and say: "I will have this—and this—and this."

They could have no cares at all.

§4

Papa Caillette, having just been sick, felt much relieved. So it was too late to go to the Château now—and the King was going to Loches?

He tugged at the lobes of his great ears, which was his habit when struggling with a thought; his face, like yellow putty, worked convulsively. "We will go to Bléré, France," he said, "we will go to Bléré, and tomorrow on to Loches, and see the King. When a small Prince is so debonair to us, how much more a great King like our good King Louis! I am Prince of jesters and players, and he, Prince of this fine land of ours; by St. Faron, we two shall get on famously." He added as a pious after-thought: "May St. Julian send fortune to us travellers. We should always pray, my lad, to St. Julian and his good parents when we start a journey. It will help us—besides, it costs nothing. I am pleased with you, France. That jest of yours unlocked the gate to wealth and fame for both of us. Besides, the young Duke's gift gives me good Vouvray when, without it, I must needs be content with *piquette*, which is no gentleman's drink, and only fit for common mountebanks. Now you will see me King's Fool before I die, and may succeed your poor father when death shuts his eyes. May good fortune always follow you, my boy——"

But France, this time by accident, splashed over the goblet of Vouvray at his father's elbow.

"—And never catch up with you, you son of a pink-eyed, splay-footed devil," Caillette roared.

France was used to these sudden changes and did not retort. But he smiled secretly, thinking that Papa was not always very complimentary to himself.

CHAPTER III THE WHITE HORSE AT BLÉRÉ

"Grégoire est un brave garçon
Qui boit et met tout dans son ventre,
Sur son habit il n'y a qu'un bouton,
Sur son nez il y en a bien trente
Sur son nez."

OLD FRENCH DRINKING-SONG.

§1

AND so through hot afternoon Papa Caillette and France—like snails great and small—crept along the road to Bléré, and Lisette, with the new little bells on her gilded chain, loped after or, when she was tired, perched on the bundle on France's back.

The dusty way lay between woods. They kept mainly to the high road, travelling slowly because of burdens, and pausing often in the shade of the trees while Papa mopped his sweaty brow, and took long pulls from the bottle. He oozed potations from every pore, and in a room was acrid and unpleasant, but open air made him tolerable. He was now in high humour. Amboise was his rainbow—he said—which promised glorious weather ahead, and no more storm or trouble; the golden angelot a cuckoo-cry of spring after long and dreary winter; glorious summer would soon be at hand for them, and their fortunes made. He assured France time and again that there was never such another King in the world, and would not be again, as good King Louis, whom the Estates at Tours had proclaimed the Father of his people. The King had wept when they bestowed that title on him, and the people had all wept in sympathy. It was very touching. Cosmo de'Medici, of course, had been dubbed "*Pater Patriae*" by his Florentines, but he was only an Italian; the Italians

were sheep—armoured sheep, someone had said, as someone had said also of the Swiss. Had not King Charles the Eighth conquered Italy in his slippers? "With chalk and slippers," went the saying; it was only a matter of chalking up the rooms he and his soldiers wanted, and taking possession. And then King Louis had beaten them hollow, out-witted them and out-fought them, and made them feel the weight of his arm; at Loches, where they were going, Lodovico il Moro, who called himself Duke of Milan which by all rights was French, had, everyone knew, been caged for years and at last died of joy when the good King set him free. Charles Caillette kept discreet silence about French reverses.

He rattled on in eulogy of the good and great King, so sage and approachable and amiable at home, so terrible and remorseless to the enemies of their country. A King who knew a good man when he saw one, too; and with a sense of humour—not a clod-hopper to sit with a face like a board, be one never so witty. When the Basoche, the Paris players, had represented the King on their stage as a *malade*, who leaped from bed cured when the doctors gave him liquid gold, he had not been offended, but had laughed heartily. There was a monarch for poor playing folk!

Caillette was so carried away that he invented a dialogue between himself and King Louis, and they halted in a glade of the woods to rehearse it. "Stomach of a little fish!" he cried, which was one of his favourite oaths, very successful on the boards. "You, boy, shall now be the King for the nonce; let us see how it goes. We are at Loches; Lisette, shall we say, is an officious lord who bars our entry. Thus—(now mark)—I wave him aside. 'Varlet, know your betters, and make way!'" He drew himself up to his full height of five feet two inches; puffed himself out to his full breadth of fifty inches; his features assumed an importance so unintentionally comical that France had much ado not to laugh. The boy had a sharper wit than his father; besides, he knew that it was dangerous for anyone to laugh at wrong moments. Lisette spoilt the opening situation by spitting and snarling when she was waved aside; her little sharp white teeth nearly caught Papa's

hand, and he had to begin again, after a savage kick at the monkey, which he could rarely manage. He made his bow, dignified but by no means subservient, to his small son, seated on a fallen tree for a throne; and France made him cordially welcome to the Court. The boy applauded all the stock sayings and jests, chuckled heartily when Papa told the tale of the stingy miller at Chenonceaux, whom he had discomfited by a reminder that, at Amiens, when the millers chose their patron saint by releasing a dove among the sculptured saints in the cathedral, the dove settled on a figure of the devil. . . . The scene ended by the King inviting the wandering player to sit beside him on the tree-trunk, and drink to the confusion of Italians, Spaniards, English, and all enemies of their country. Papa drank graciously and with great good will from the flask he had brought from the Ste. Barbe at Amboise.

All this took time; when the little play was over the sun was climbing fast down the heavens. The flask having reached its last drop, they stayed for a few minutes at the inn at Bléré-la-Croix. Here a friar who shared the same bench tried to sell Papa some hairs of St. Anthony's pig for luck. He wanted none, and said he could make luck for himself, and had hairs enough for a herd. They passed the little church and a few minutes later came to the ancient bridge. Row on row rose the slim poplars, and the Cher gleamed like a silver bar below. Its sandy islands were aglow with sunset; wooded banks ran into misty and sombre distances; a great fish leapt just as the huge red disk of the sun sank from the rim of the painted sky, and the river, all rose and silver, drank it up. You could almost hear the hiss as it went down.

§2

Their inn, the *Cheval Blanc,* was the centre of the hamlet, near the ancient and battered church. On his way to see royalty, and with money in his poche, Papa Caillette must have the best room, which luckily was vacant. A few farmers, easy-going fellows whose talk was all of crops and prices, sat at table with them over the great dish of fritters and flasks of red and white

Vouvray. Papa held himself, for a wonder, in a dignified aloofness; every now and then he stopped his gobbling to tug with greasy thumbs and forefingers at the lobes of his great ears, and his narrow brow puckered in wrinkles; France knew then that he was deep in thought. It was an excellent inn, with a comfortable host and hostess who studied their guests and had tried to make their house attractive by many small devices. On the walls of the room where they supped were crude frescoes in vivid colours, painted Gothic texts. Two men in a corner were playing draughts; others, after the meal, busied themselves with cards, the pictures on which represented the Paladins of romance. France fed Lisette, and watched his neighbours and the villagers who kept coming in from the outside world, now—as Papa Caillette remarked—so dark that a flea could not see to bite or jump. They had been to Bléré before, but had always stayed in Bléré-la-Croix across the river, where the inn was cheaper, and less good; they had never spent very much time in Bléré itself.

It was still hot, and some men and women had gone outside and sat talking on a bench against the wall of the inn, in the glimmer of light that came from door and window; the mutter of their voices, a laugh now and then, the cry of a child, the sharp, short barking of a dog, drifted to France's ears. His father was questioning their hostess. Left to himself, the boy had an odd feeling that the village, the inn, the courtyard into which one of the doors of the room opened, and the room itself, were not unfamiliar, in the dim world called memory, he really knew them all well. A horse was led through the court to its stable; well, he had heard the clatter of hoofs at night in that court before, he was very certain. They went up the narrow, uneven stairs to bed. And here again all seemed curiously and inexplicably familiar, nor did the room surprise him at all. But he gave a little cry of bewilderment when, just under a painted text which, after the custom, decorated most inn bedrooms of any consequence, he saw a printed picture nailed up; an engraving bearing the date, "1499."* The curious feeling: "I have been here

* This early French engraving is probably the first instance of the political caricature.

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before, I have seen this before," again swept over him. The little man in the flat cap and with the sword who was picking up cards from the floor—the men in golden and jewelled crowns at the table—the Pope in the triple crown shielding spectacled eyes—yes; he had seen them all before, he felt sure.

His father was in a good mood, content with himself and with the world. He would ask him.

"Stomach of a fish, boy, but 'tis a good omen," was the reply he had, "for there is our good King Louis himself whom we shall see before many hours are out, and who will make both our fortunes." He jabbed a stubby finger at a figure on the right of the engraving; a man with long, straight hair, a chain of golden shells, wide, hanging sleeves, a hat plumed and jewelled. "That is King Louis, and he is just telling these others that he has a flush of cards. That old fellow in the high cap—the one with the forked beard—is the Doge of Venice, and he with the lions on his coat and the crown is King Henry of England, father of their new King. The other King with his crown awry is Spain, with the Infanta Margarita next him; see, she's winking at those Switzers in the corner."

Charles Caillette jabbed at the tiny figures of the drawing; this was the Duke of Wurtemberg, this the Count Palatine, this the Marquis of Montferrat; here were the Duke of Savoy, the Duke of Lorraine serving the company with drink from an ewer—the Duke of Milan—a little, stunted figure picking up fallen cards to make a game for himself. And there was the Emperor —and there Pope Alexander peering through his spectacles and shielding his eyes.

It was called "*Le Revers du Jeu des Suysses,*" and was a political cartoon celebrating the success of the King's diplomacy in making the Swiss renew their old treaty with King Charles VIII, before he started on his first Italian expedition.

"But . . . I have seen it all before!" said France, bewildered. "I have been here before!"

"Well, get into bed," said his father gruffly, "and see if you've been in *that* before. Sharp, or you'll find it easier to lie in it before than behind."

At this threat of stick or strap, the boy stripped off the brown gabardine smock, the patched hose; on his thin brown legs were no stockings. But he slept uneasily. When morning light crept into the room, and cocks were crowing, he got as quietly as he could to the unglazed window and stood there for a long time, in wonder and thought. The air was as yet cool and fresh and sweet; there was no life in the street, and hardly any sound in the world except his father's snoring, as he lay, big-eared and open-mouthed, like a gargoyle, on the straw-packed bed. Yes, France was sure he had once been at the inn and in this very room; it was here the very beautiful lady had kissed him and been kind, and here had been flickering candle-light and strange shadows, and she had pressed something—(a coin? a medal? a jewel? France could not remember)—into his small palm, and after that all was blur and blank. It stood in his mind as one may see a house window lit up suddenly in a landscape covered by darkness; for a minute one sees a room, figures, movements —the light goes, and everything is gone.

By and by a man came from a gateway opposite, driving cows; then a freckled girl with some goats went towards the river; after a long time, a bevy of girls passed chatting gaily, balancing empty jugs on their heads. By and by a bell rang a monotonous tinkle from the church. A puffy-faced little priest hurried along, glancing in a bird-like fashion from left to right, and chirping a good morning to a workman who, on a ladder against a house of grey stone in the square, saluted him. Surely France had looked out of this window long ago.

He went to the picture of the Princes playing their game of cards; yes—yes—— Turning suddenly he noticed that his bed-fellow was awake, and watching him curiously.

France blurted out: "Papa, I am sure I have been here before. But I remember in such a funny way; all in little bits, like the puzzle that farmer's wife at Montrichard gave me once, which you had to put together, and some bits were missing. . . . Did we *live* at Bléré?"

His father grunted, which he took to mean yes.

"And—and—was I born at Bléré, or did we come here afterwards?"

"Stomach of a little fish!" said his father, though with no bad humour (sometimes questioning made him angry), "here are more posers for the Sorbonne! You'll have bits missing, by St. Brice, if you wake me with silly questions. . . . Does a man come into the world *when* he is born, or *after* he is born? But I know nothing; 'tis a wise father even that knows his own son."

"And that beautiful lady? I can just remember——"

"If your mother were alive she might tell you about that beautiful lady. If she was there when you were born she might tell you all about her. But if she was *away* when you were born—eh, boy? She was that sort of girl; always one to hurry up twenty minutes after anything had happened, and all of a fluster; and never where she was wanted. Yes, yes; that was the way with her." There was an odd, husky tenderness in his voice. '"Am I too late? Is my little son born already?" "Yes, madame," says the wise woman; "yes, madame," says the leech; "your little son could not wait for you, and was born twenty minutes before you came."' He chuckled, as he always did at his own crude jokes. It was an oddly creaking and rumbling kind of chuckle, as if a bucket were being drawn on a rusty chain from a well. But he sighed at the end, and said: "My poor Simone! She was too soon once."

"When did she die, Papa?"

"Like most of us, when she had no more breath . . . poor lass. . . . I expect 'twas on that night you remember."

France was silent for a minute. He was thinking hard; trying hard to put his puzzle together. His father watched him, and added: "You were too soon also, my son; you came two months after we were married."

The priest hurried past the window from the grey, patched church in the stumpy steeple of which the bell had clanged and creaked.

"Aye," went on Caillette, "let him hurry—but priests were not quick enough then."

France's eyes grew bigger, and they were big eyes already for a boy small for his nine years. Of course

he did not know all he pretended to know on the boards or at the inns where they kept country yokels in a gape or in noisy laughter. Some of the things his father taught him to say he could never understand, nor why they set people winking, and slapping their knees, and chuckling. Between the lewd and himself it was often as if a sword lay as in the *couvade* between the serf-woman and her lord before her marriage to the serf who was to have her. But he knew a good deal. Two months!

"And I only met your mother a month before we married; so puzzle that out, France." He seemed on the point of saying more, but stopped, shrugged his heavy, naked shoulders (he was sitting up in bed now) and yawned. The heat had beaded the grey hairs of his chest; his breasts shook unpleasantly. He hummed a snatch of an old drinking song popular at his performances, for it fitted him well—

"Le cabaret est mon reduit,
Quand j'y suis, je suis dans mon centre,
Je n'en sors jamais qua'minuit,
Dès le point du jour j'y rentre,
Dès le point du jour
Dès le point du jour
Dès le point du jour j'y rentre."

He asked abruptly: "What o'clock, France? But I must go out before mid-night. There is time for an hour's sleep yet; do you put on your things and get out. Make yourself scarce boy. Amuse yourself, boy. No, no, nenny no; not those old things, but your best, and we may buy some better before we go to the King's house."

"Father, if I was born——"

"By the Chemise of Chartres!" roared Caillette, "do you not hear me say 'Get out'? The black devil will get you, my son, as far as you may be my son, if you don't obey; beware of him, France. Beware of disobediences, drunkennesses, lewdnesses, cards, dice, priests, horses, women, and mules; which all go hand in hand. Where shall you go? To the river, and drown yourself. To the church, and find devils. Devils and saints—*and* Virgins. *Mort de Dieu,* I've seen so many virgins in churches that I never want to

see another virgin in all my days. . . . Get you gone till I want you." He drew up the coverlet and rolled over with a grunt of satisfaction for another sleep. As he tucked the sheet about his neck his hand caught the rough bristle of his chin; "and bring me," he added, "a shave from the barber's."

This was an old jest; France, seeing that his father was not really in a bad humour, grinned, took Lisette, who had been gibbering in a corner, by the chain, and went out into the sun.

§3

And first he entered the church, pausing at the door to give a sou to a beggar-man without arms, who whined that he had lost them in King Charles's Italian war. But he could not stay longer than to say a prayer, because Lisette tugged impatiently on her chain which he had fastened to a rail near the church door. There were a few tawdry images, and one figure of Our Lady whom he chose for his brief orisons because it had hurt him a little (though he had laughed) when his father had said he wished never to clap eyes on Virgins again. A gentle smile, it seemed to him, was on the lips of Our Lady; she clasped the child lovingly and tenderly; France thought to himself: "Thus my own mother may have held me in her arms before I remember. Or was she sorry because I came too soon? Perhaps people nudged themselves and jested about her, as they nudge and jest in the inn-yards; but perhaps they nudged and jested once too in Jewry about Our Blessed Lady." She had had many sorrows on earth; he added a tiny wish of his own, besides praying for his own mother's soul and lighting a taper for her, that Our Lady might now be very happy herself in heaven, and she and Jesus having a good time after their long-ago trouble.

It was cool and peaceful in the musty little church, and from God's house he always came out grave and quietly happy to the world. Already the sun had grown fierce; it was market-day, he found, and in the morning heat the country-folk had set up their stalls behind the church. There were all kinds of paltry finery, and fruits, vegetables and flowers making such a show of

colour that the fancy took him of God with a vast paint-box colouring everything He made (and the sky must be His palette); he always wondered where the colours were stored at night, and how God remembered to put them all next day in their right places. There were eggs in abundance, flasks and barrels of wine, cheeses, fowls, ducks and geese, garments and tools, and stalls of suckets for children. He went away from the clatter and clutter to the river. A pleasant, friendly river, this Cher; a grove of trees on the edge of the hamlet to the left gave shade to a few old and tired folk; beyond were thick rushes at the water's edge; inland were fields and vineyards. He walked a quarter of a mile or so, glad of his freedom; then turned and went onto the old stone bridge. For miles he could see the vista of the stream running between wooded banks where, here and there, was a tiny, white, red-roofed house like a toy, or the slate roof of some small farm, or a mill. Leaning over the parapet, he saw the dragon-flies darting this way and that over tangled weeds, and sometimes settling for an instant; very pale, beautiful blue were most, but some of darker colouring; there were butterflies coquetting, swifts showing their vivid blue and snowy-white waistcoats and under-wings as they flew tirelessly about the creviced stones; the water was so glass-clear that he could see innumerable fish, great and very small, shooting to and fro beneath, and sometimes one would leap high into the air and splash back while he watched. Going again to the bank, France descended by a narrow and slippery path to the plateau of coarse grass and bushes at the water's edge. A few boys were bathing, and some had waded out to a little island where he could see their pink, lithe bodies flash in and out among bushes as they played hide and seek or robbers; or perhaps French and Italians. A girl sat on the bank watching cows that grazed near the water, and here, too, were the goats he had seen pass the window early in the day. In the heat, just tempered by the coolness of the stream, one could sit and laze and watch for hours. There was a milk-white nanny among the goats, and her little milk-white kid; while his big eyes were watching it all a huge dog like a

wolf ran down, and towards the kid, but stopped when it came to it, as if unable to make it out. The kid was not in the least afraid, but pranced and leapt and curvetted, while its mother looked on with a corner of a suspicious eye to see that there was no trouble. The kid was showing off; it reared on its tiny hoofs, and playfully butted now and then with tiny stumps of horns. Suddenly France saw the mother-goat lower her own thick clouded horns and rush at the dog, which drew back, and then, but with caution, approached the kid again. The herd-girl was watching, and when the kid, utterly fearless perhaps because too foolish to fear, ran towards its adversary, she came up smiling, and drove off the dog with a stick. Perhaps the dog had been only playing too, and happy in the glorious sunshine.

Lisette grew restive; France did not want to bring the dog towards them; he covered the monkey with his gabardine, and climbed up the difficult slope. Papa would very likely be ready to get up now as they had a longish tramp before them into Loches. Indeed, his fat, hairy legs were already thrust in his hose, and he was grumbling because France was not back. They had some bread, cheese and plums, and wine, and then started out—after a little haggling over the score, which always happened. Papa must now have the shave which France had, of course, not been able to bring him; he tried to make the barber take half his fee when he had done, and, on his refusal, told him (it was another of his favourite jests) that he would have to put back his beard again. In the market-place he haggled at a booth over some finery; things, he said, should be cheaper than at Loches where the King and Court were expected. But he bought a gay new doublet for France, and new hose and shoes for himself; the old things had grown shabby and worn. An hour before noon, they were on their road to Loches, sixteen miles or so away. The greater part of their journey lay through Loches Forest. Some woodcutters told them that a large party of gentlemen and ladies had ridden through quite early, but did not know if King Louis was among them—perhaps he was, but the party travelled very fast, and in clouds of dust. As they drew near Loches, in

a green meadow behind which were the marshes of the Indre, a pleasant sight met them; two Sisters in spotless white and blue, like the many Virgins in France's churches and cathedrals, sat at needle-work under a spreading tree, and round them in the shade was a bevy of little, laughing, chattering girls, all occupied at some task—one making lace, another knitting, another working a fragment of a shaggy rug on canvas—but none too busy for all that to spare a look at the passers-by. One little girl smiled mischievously at France, but when he smiled back put out the tip of her tongue at him, and spoke to the girl next her, and both giggled. The Sisters' eyes were bent on their work, so that they saw nothing of this. France could not resist turning his head, and then the two little girls blew kisses, which he blew shyly back.

Papa Caillette fell in talk with a man going towards the town, and it seemed these little girls were of gentle birth, and the Queen maintained a school at Loches, where nearly three hundred of them learnt housewifery and all useful arts pertaining to ladies. The Queen was much loved and very benevolent, said this man, though she was a Breton and did not love France overmuch, and it was no bad thing that girls who might one day marry nobles and gentlemen should know their duties.

They lost little time on this journey, and it was still early when they found an inn close to the ancient Picoys gate. The town was full of folk, and there were many men-at-arms in the streets. They were lucky to find an attic to share with others. Papa, over his bottle, stopped now and then to give a tug at one great ear or another, or both, puckering up his narrow brow in hard thought; was it wiser to go up that day before dusk to the Château and try their fortune, or wait till the morrow? The King, he said, was always ready to welcome his subjects, even the humblest, and it was this that made him so much loved. Crowds would wait on the roads to see him pass, and flock round him, and be happy if they could kiss or even touch his garments; he forbade none, and would not have even the meanest denied, or thrust back by his guards. If they so much

as touched the gilded trappings of his mule they would kiss their fingers as though these were henceforth reliquaries. Because of his love and good care for his people (and his sternness towards their enemies) the churches and shrines had all been filled with weeping and praying folk when, a few years back, he had been thought sick unto death. . . . Yet perhaps it were better to wait till morning. To strike when the iron is hot is good—but better not to burn fingers in over haste. His royal progress might have wearied his Majesty; there would perhaps be deputations—if he were in no mood for mummers that night, he might dismiss them with a few gracious words. Besides, the King loved simplicity and kept early hours. Sometimes he would be a-bed soon after six. The morrow, for all the wise saws, does have a way of coming.

Now that they were arrived, Caillette's swaggering confidence seemed to lose some of its certainty. France saw that, but the boy was happy enough to wait. A gallery ran round the courtyard and the room where they supped opened onto it; a staircase of blackened oak, on the balustrade of which were carved many fearsome heads of beasts, ran from the cobbled yard to the gallery. There was plenty to be seen. Horses were led in and out. Ostlers hissed and whistled at their work. A hunting party rode into the yard, and ordered drink; game was brought in by the beaters. Two friars entered the supper room to beg. He could see the insides of rooms on the opposite gallery—in one a gentleman flirted with a pretty chamber-maid; in another was a family, father, mother, maid and three children; a boy was teasing a white falcon, until his father saw him and struck him violently, making him cry. Some soldiers below were jesting with the plump hostess. France knew from their uniforms, white, with crowns on the breasts that these belonged to the famous Scottish Archers. Oh, there was plenty to amuse one.

After supper they went into the narrow street and saw the black mass of the castle. It was so vast, so dark, so strong, and looked so grim and pitiless, that France was just a little awed. Windows showed lights here and there, and here and there a lanthorn or cresset

showed a faint yellow light high on the walls. He heard the far-off challenge of a sentry; a boy's voice sang a snatch of song, the words inaudible. From the *Logis du Roy* came a wail and throb of stringed instruments and drums. He supposed the King and Queen and Court were at their own supper now.

But when the pair lay a-bed, with strangers snoring, grunting, turning, tossing, around them, France could not sleep because Loches, now night had fallen, seemed somehow so old, and grim, and cruel. A wan moon had risen. He could just see part of the frowning mass of the Château from the window. In the rock, he knew, were terrible dungeons where men had been tortured and had died; where men had slowly starved; where men, no doubt, while merriment and jest went on so near, languished even now in anguish; thinking unutterable things about freedom, and friends, and the forbidden joys of the world. A joyous world—and a cruel and terrible world; a world where misery and gladness, poverty, riches, were very near neighbours. . . . He grew certainly a little frightened before sleep came.

CHAPTER IV KING LOUIS IS DEBONAIR

" On conserve encore le portrait
De ce digne et bon prince. . . .
Les jours de fêtes bien souvent
La foule s'ecrie en buvant
Devint
Oh! oh! oh! oh!!! ah! ah! ah!!!
Quel bon petit Roy c'etait là
Là, là. . . ." LE ROY D'YVETÔT. BERANGER.

§1

CHARLES CAILLETTE, France, and Lisette, the little grey mónkey, went up betimes to the castle. Papa had hesitated long before he could decide whether the boy and the monkey should go up with him. Yet why not? Lisette, in her cap of purple and green velvet and yellow and mauve and blue feathers, her brocaded jacket and gilded leash and gilded bells,

would raise a smile, which was always useful as an introduction to friendliness, and the boy had the knack of making strangers well-disposed. A very pretty boy indeed, with his dark, soft hair, his great dark eyes dreamy and wistful yet quick to snap into brightness at a jest; his lithe, graceful figure; his cheeks tanned with sunshine, and a red glow of health under the tan.

About his own attractions Papa Caillette had no doubts. He had thought out everything carefully. His great card to play was always a crafty foolishness and seeming simplicity; a medley which had come to him by nature. People liked their fools to seem really fools. It tickled their own self-wisdom and importance. He traded in blunders, in follies, in absurdities, in insolences. And yet he must show these great people that he was something more than a simple fool. What did well enough for yokels in a village courtyard might not do for a King. There must be subtlety within his folly—and the King, a wise man learned in affairs, skilled in reading others, must detect it, and be flattered by his astuteness in doing so. Mentally he ran over his latest topicalities. When the moment came, there must be some shrewd hits at the Pope, against whom, after the decision of the Council at Tours, King Louis might make sinless war. Caillette had some very good jests ready about Pope Julius. There was one about his well-known liking for quince jelly. But because the Queen was very devout and did not approve this squabble with the Holy Father—her Breton Council had opposed the decision at Tours—he must tread delicately on that ground if she were present; pleasing the King, without offence to her. Then the Italians were popular and easy game; and, should the Queen be there, a sly hit at the Countess of Angoulême, Louise of Savoy, might not come amiss if it were cautiously—oh, *very* cautiously—done. This would again be difficult, to be sure, for here the King must not be offended. He wanted to put to advantage their encounter with the young Prince. Queen Anne had no love for the gay widow at Amboise, who had never concealed her delight at having a son when the Queen's own boys were all dead; and the attempt to stop the

Queen's baggage going to Brittany by the Loire, when all had thought King Louis on his death-bed and the Queen's power gone, had not been forgotten or forgiven. Anne of Brittany was never one to forget or forgive over-lightly.

A few court-scandals—the affair, for instance, of Surgère—might just be touched upon; and one could always raise a laugh by ridiculing fashions. Every parish priest did it from his pulpit. Or the masterfulness of women—but once more he must go softly if the Queen were there. And the King himself might not like that, he was touchy about anything that seemed to reflect upon his Consort; though once, to be sure, he had been so annoyed by her endeavour to have her own way that he had told her the old Fable of the hind who asked God for antlers like a stag, but, having them, and misusing them, was soon deprived of them by the Creator. Jokes and patter about friars, doctors, officials—oh, there were plenty of these to draw upon, culled from a certain tattered book he had, and from very many sources, and none the worse for their age—like good wine.

They had never been dressed so finely as that morning. Papa Caillette was in all the colours of the rainbow. France wore his new clothes, and stockings and shoes; in their trampings it was more often bare legs and feet, or sabots at the best, and the old, faded gabardine. He looked well, and knew it. At the moment of starting they found that a cheap tinsel ouche to fasten the doublet was missing; his father brought out a substitute the like of which France had never known. Or had he? Again came a vague feeling that he was seeing what he had already seen. This was something one could not buy for a few sous at a village trinket-fair. It was like those beautiful and costly things in the goldsmith's shop at Amboise.

"Oh, father, and is it *real* gold?" he cried.

Caillette grunted and nodded.

"Of the standard of the touch of Paris?" the boy asked, echoing parrot-like the goldsmith's words, which he only half understood.

"What do you know of such matters? By St.

Gatier, your tongue like your nose is a metre too long. Pin it on; it is my gift to you, son, on this very notable day."

The boy turned over the brooch just put in his brown hand. It was set with tiny diamonds—were they real? They dazzled in the sun, and there were strange blue lights in the stones. . . . And these diamonds formed the image of a tiny stag, running. It was exquisitely made.

"But—but—Papa, who is *Charles Monsieur?*"

Because the blue and silver case for playing cards made for the Countess bore the same device; and it was for *Charles Monsieur;* or might be. When he was telling him the goldsmith had given his craftsman that queer smile and wink, and the craftsman had grinned back. France had the strange feeling that long, long ago—in another world perhaps—he had seen the brooch and handled it.

His father, growing suddenly impatient, thrust the pin into his doublet with rough hands, slapped him violently on the back, making him wince, and, without waiting for more questions, gave finishing touches to his own toilet. As an afterthought he dabbed a little flour from a screw of paper on his small but pimpled and too rubicund nose.

They climbed the slope to the great, towered gateway of the Château of Loches. A little crowd of people were about the gate, and some passing in and out over the draw-bridge, the guard giving these only cursory glances, but, now and then, singling out someone for question. Tradesfolk and lackeys were taking in provisions and other goods for the use of the Court; wine, edibles, furniture, rolls of tapestry, carpets, tents, planks and logs. A soldier in a kind of blue cassock, and blue hose slashed with white, with the badge of a porcupine bristling with quills embroidered on back and chest, was busy waxing or oiling a bow near the gate; he looked up, and asked Papa Caillette—now advancing boldly with a great swagger—his business. "We are players whom Monseigneur the Duke of Amboise has sent to see his High Mightiness our Most Christian King," he answered pompously, and they passed on quickly, in case of sudden recall, through a

fine courtyard where a group of boys were playing under an enormous chestnut. The royal pages, evidently; as bright and gay as butterflies, as tulips, as the dragon-flies France had stood so long watching from Bléré bridge. Some of them were surely no older than France himself. A ball was being tossed from one to another. The boy who was just throwing it saw them and turned his head sharply, crying out: "Hi! Not that way!"

Papa strode on with great dignity, but the boy ran after him, some of his companions following. "Sir," said the page—a pale, snub-nosed lad, taller than the rest (he was dressed in gold and yellow)—"you cannot go that way; 'tis to the *Logis du Roy*, and is forbidden."

Caillette essayed to wave him aside with a podgy and dirty hand. "Boy, I have private and urgent business with his Christian Majesty."

"Your grandson also, sir?" put in a second boy.

"Your monkey also, sir? Vermandois, ask if the monkey has business also," cried another boy, in a tunic of scarlet cloth with gold and silver lace, and laughed.

The first who had spoken cried: "Silence!" testily to his companions, and addressed himself again, this time with exaggerated politeness, to Charles Caillette. "Sir, I regret that you may not pass. This is the way to the King's apartments."

"Is it? A million thanks, young man; then I am on my right road," said Caillette, and, as if he had not understood, but interpreted the answer for permission, called to France to follow him, and continued on his way with affected unconcern. The page Vermandois and some of his companions intercepted him. "Do you not hear?" Vermandois asked haughtily. "You cannot pass. . . . La Roche-Chandre, go and tell Captain de Nançay this man will not listen to an order. . . . Surely his ears are big enough."

"A thousand blue devils!" cried Caillette, losing his temper, "are we, who have played before the Countess d'Angoulême, and the young Duke, to be stopped from seeing our good King by a parcel of little boys? Stand aside, sir; I would not take such orders from the Duke of Russia or the Doge of Venice;

no, nor the Emperor himself. Nenny no," he spluttered. "As for my ears, they are as God made them, with a little help from an old sow of an innkeeper's wife at Peignac who pulled them nearly off my head when she was drunk, and did not like my telling her so. Devil carry you away, sir! Are things at such a pass that a good Frenchman may not see his King like the rest of the world?"

"No doubt his monkey is also a good Frenchman," said the second page who had spoken, and, seeing Lisette scratching herself, made her a mocking grimace, scratching his own scarlet coat in an imitation that set some of the other pages bubbling with laughter.

"More French than you," said Papa Caillette, beside himself with indignation, "more French than you! And if you want my real business with your master, let me tell you"—he pointed to Lisette—"I bring the King another page since those he has serve him so ill. Stomachs of a million fishes, it is one handsomer than you, with apologies to the monkey for so small a compliment!"

The little Seigneur de la Roche-Chandre came up with an officer, who listened courteously to Caillette's almost incoherent story. But had he any missive from the Duke d'Amboise? Or Madame? If not, it was impossible to see the King. . . . No, the Duke and the Countess were not at the Château; they had gone hunting in Loches Forest, and might not be back until night, when the King would be a-bed.

As Charles Caillette continued to argue the matter, making up a story on the spur of the moment that King Charles of Blessed Memory, after whom he was named, had once welcomed him at Amboise with open arms (he remembered that King Charles in his last months of penitence did fling wide his doors to his poorer subjects) the officer told him curtly to go to that Majesty if he could find his way to him, and turned on his heel. Near the gate he gave an order to some soldiers. Discretion seemed the better part of valour; the pages were all sniggering, the soldiers uncomfortably near. Papa Caillette stalked out with as much dignity as possible, France, with Lisette in his arms, following him through

the gate. They had to hurry in the end, for the soldiers quickened their pace. Lisette turned her little monkey-face and grinned. She had small respect for uniforms; having one herself, and a plumed cap that Alexander, Cæsar, Charlemagne and the Paladins might have coveted. Certainly there were no such caps or plumes in their wardrobes.

§2

Here, then, was a fine to-do. Papa had been so confident; all had seemed plain-sailing—and now his hopes were dashed to the ground. He blubbered with vexation. He swore and maledicted with an energy that would have put a troop of the King's horse to shame. It was "Mort-de-Dieu" and "Mort-Diable"; it was "By the Stomachs of a Thousand Million Little Fishes" and by half a calendar of obscure saints. France was scared by the number and vividness of the devils he brought in to bear him witness; green devils, blue devils, red devils, mauve devils, pink devils, devils everything but white. These pages with their two centuries of descent apiece—who were they? Devils carry them away! Billions of millions of great and little fishes have them in their stomachs! They were not the only folks whose ancestors had been in high positions. His own grandfather had died in a very high position indeed, which he hoped all these young popinjays might reach—he had been hanged at the great stone gibbet at Montfaucon, and so, he prophesied would they. . . . And the officer who had ordered him off. . . . *And* the soldiers. . . . *And*——

He very nearly said: "And the King." But of course the King did not know. A good King, no doubt, though he had sunk in Caillette's estimation; a King surely very weak, to let such fellows come between him and honest subjects. Everyone knew he was ruled by his wife, whose heart was in Brittany. "My Bret!" he called her in his soft fondness. A Breton clod-hopper, now, would have got in easily enough; the Court, they said, stank of Brittany artichokes and musty cider, and Breton priests and guards—while good Frenchmen—but he would be even with them all yet.

. . . He tugged at his great ears and wrinkled up his narrow, pitted forehead.

They went back to their inn, *Le Grand Cerf,* where he consoled himself with a great flask of wine. But first he made France put on his patched gabardine, and took back the pretty brooch. The heat was almost intolerable; by and by, still mumbling threats and grievances, Papa Caillette began to nod. The flies and the mosquitoes from the Indre Marshes were a nuisance; again and again they jerked him wide awake by their tickling, when he would rumble on afresh with his grievances and threats. He did not really want to sleep, but to scheme; yet off he went at last, and France, after listening for twenty minutes to the phlegmy snoring, betook himself to the streets. It was Wednesday, and Market Day; but he soon left the crowds, and followed the road towards the Indre, where he spent more time than he knew watching some men setting *marettes* —limed twigs which they stuck in the mud at the edge of the pools, to catch small birds. When he reached the inn again his father had vanished.

France waited a while before going in search of him. He came in his quest to the gate of the Château, and here an unmistakable hubbub met his ears. Above it all rose a yell and then: "France! France! *Monseigneur le Roy! Haro, Haro, O Mon Prince, on me fait tort!* France! Help! Help!" It was Papa in trouble—in grievous trouble—shouting, expostulating, screaming for France and for his Prince, blubbering—shrieking at last in real anguish. France found the gate for a moment undefended; he rushed into the courtyard. A sentry in scarlet was ahead of him, running also to the rescue, or perhaps to the arrest of the disturber of Summer's drowsy peace. For a moment the boy could not see what was happening. A crowd of pages in all colours of the rainbow—pages of the stables, pages of the kitchen, pages of the presence, pages of Madame, pages of the Archbishop of Lyons, de Rohan, who was now in Loches, pages of the Queen's household—surged round the great chestnut in the court. They laughed, they shouted, and someone invisible in their midst—but France knew it was

his father—sent to a pitiless heaven this hullaballoo that rose piercingly above all their own. France Caillette, dragging the inseparable Lisette by her gilded chain, rushed like a tornado into their midst. He struck and slapped and pushed, and the boys fell back before him, though a page in the Queen's red and gold turned and hit out savagely, making one cheek scarlet, and drawing a little blood.

There was poor Papa, nailed by the enormous lobe of one enormous ear to a post against the castle wall near the great chestnut, and yelling piteously for mercy and help. Blood trickled down his gaudy clothes, and tears streamed down his flaccid cheeks. On his doublet, and down his neck, they mingled with the greeny-yellow of rotten eggs, the brown squashy mess of mouldy apples. A boy flung a dead rat. France's sun-burnt little fists shot out to right and left; he pushed and pulled, kicked and butted, and, being very lithe and active, wriggled and dodged in a successful evasion of blows struck at him in return. Most of the young tormentors were about his own age. He had an ally in Lisette, who, free for a minute from her chain, scratched and spat and gibbered, now and then giving a shrewd nip to some leg. She was vicious with fear to which the jangling of her chain added fresh fright. A page, taller than the rest, in yellow and gold, incited the others; he had his back turned, and the tail of his pourpoint was missing. One of France's new shoes, snatched off and used hastily as a weapon, hit the lad smack on the back.

Poor Caillette, held by one ear, wrenched himself free from his pillory at the very moment when France reached him. His ear spurted out blood; the sharp, thin nail, forced from its insecure hold, was still in the lobe. Papa closed his eyes and sank into his son's arms, almost upsetting him by his weight.

It was all a matter of a few moments. The hubbub brought at an unwieldy run a stocky, red-faced, bull-necked archer of the guard, who was yelling threats of *savates*—stripes—called after the old shoe with which they were administered, and the usual punishment for misdemeanour among the pages. These boys, from the

best families of France and Brittany, and some not nine years old, had a name for unruliness. There had been trouble not long before because they had branded an unpopular riding-master with a red-hot spur; the Grand Equerry had made much fuss about it, and reported the ring-leaders to the King. Then all Loches had laughed over the trick they had played on a Capuchin who preached to them daily—some of the boys having blocked up his door, alarmed him with a sudden cry of "Fire!" made plausible by smouldering rags; and had then lured him to a water-butt below, where, as Papa Caillette had once said in telling France the story, he had been very effectually put out. . . . But how Papa, snoring in the inn when he was left, had found his way into their company was a mystery.

The pages scattered, all but the tall boy with the torn pourpoint, who told the guardsman his tale; the lad choked with indignation. It was the snub-nosed lad who had prevented them earlier in the day from entering the *Logis du Roy*. He had been dozing, he said, on a grass-plot in a quiet corner of the court, having been allowed out of class earlier than his companions—his dinner and the heat had disagreed with him—and when he awoke he found part of his garment hacked away, and the intruder beating a slow retreat with the strip of yellow and gold pinned on behind. Shamelessly Papa Caillette had even been wagging the tail as he walked, not caring what eyes saw him, and, when the page ran towards the guardroom to complain, the pilferer made insulting gestures and shouted insolent remarks after him—had even pulled a long nose! A pretty way for this clown to treat a gentleman whose family went back to Charlemagne's days! And then some of the pages had come pouring out of class—every afternoon when there was no special duty they had two hours at their books—and, seeing the insult, had given the offender this salutary lesson.

Their victim was set down in the dust; France mopped the injured ear with a strip torn from his gabardine. It bled a great deal. But the other ear took in the tale. Caillette opened one watery, small eye cautiously; closed it; opened the other; at last opened

both. His face was as pale as bled veal. "Death of a piebald devil," he murmured, in a feeble voice, "what a tale of a tail! *I've* not seen his tail. Perhaps Lisette has got it." A twinge shot through him; he whined: "France, France, they have killed your poor father; he will never flap ears again as of old. And I know no more of his tail than the tail of Jonah's Ass or Baalam's Whale. . . . *Mon Prince, Haro! Haro!* . . . My ears were half my fortune; Lord, Lord, how many a time have I kept men on a roar with them —and now there is but one left to flap. . . A lop-eared jester. . . . I cannot think without them: I cannot reflect; all my thinking will be by halves. . . . By the Chemise of Chartres, 'tis the Street of Mauvais-Garçons, this place." There was such a street in Paris, to which he had often threatened to pack France off. He turned to the page: "Boy, give me back my ear for your tail."

"I am the Seigneur de Vermandois, sir, if you are addressing me," answered the page haughtily. "And you have spoilt my best pourpoint."

"And you have spoilt my best ear," whimpered Caillette.

§3

A small crowd had collected, but all the pages, except Vermandois, had scattered. Caillette was dragged up into sitting posture with his back against the great chestnut. As he touched the bark, he gave a scream as of one giving up the ghost—rolled over in agony—and there, behind him, pinned on doubtless by himself, was a strip of yellow silk braided with gold lace. It was fastened by the ouche with the crest of the running stag, which France had worn that day, and had been obliged to give back. Though it still held, the sharp long pin had worked loose; hence this fresh dolour.

From a window at that moment came an imperative inquiry. Two gentlemen stood in the window, from which they had evidently been watching with amusement and some perplexity; but this commotion would disturb the King's afternoon peace, and the offender must be brought in for question. After a few anxious

minutes France saw Papa led away, a passive but blubbering captive, towards the *Logis du Roy;* two archers went with him, using him roughly. At the entrance of the royal apartments France's own passage was barred by the halberds of the guard; he must wait the King's pleasure, and hold himself in readiness in case he were sent for. And so, fondling and soothing Lisette, he had to kick heels in an ante-room where three or four very tall soldiers, in blue cassocks with great white crosses on backs and breasts, were talking together in a strange tongue which he knew must be Scottish; they cast a glance at him and then paid him no more attention. But when a few minutes had passed, one of them, the youngest of the group, came across and, after a grimace at Lisette viciously returned, asked France a question or two in French which, though passable, was certainly not the French of Touraine or even Paris. As they were speaking an official entered and told France to follow.

He went through a groined passage, through a room hung with tapestries and then another—there seemed endless tapestries, hung one over another, as old country women would sometimes wear petticoat on petticoat—and so between guards into a room where King Louis sat on a great chair of state under a cloth of state with golden lilies on blue. Another chair beside it was unoccupied. The boy stood dazzled by the blaze of colour and of flashing jewels. On the walls were again tapestries; indeed, the King's châteaux were full of them; they hung everywhere; so numerous were they that there was never sufficient wall space, and beneath one could be seen the upper or lower part of another; perhaps on one only legs of men and animals might be visible, and on another helmets and heads and treetops and fleecy clouds. Here and there above the arras were dusty antlers and masks. Painted and carved coffers, and gilded candlesticks were set about the room, which was full of Court officials, pages, and plumed officers, wearing all the colours of sunset or dawn. Some present were in semi-armour, damascened in silver or gold. Near the King were Scottish Guards—gigantic fellows, taller than and differently dressed from some in

the outer room; they were in white *soyon*, with golden or gilded plates on the breasts graven with a crown; France had noticed a party of them at the *Grand Cerf*. He found his feet not on sand or rushes, but on a soft carpet of Lyons velvet, so that one walked almost without sound.

And there was Papa Caillette, his back to him, and, still sticking from his broad rump (like a flag from the stern of a barge) the strip of yellow silk broidered with gold.

And there was the King—but at sight of him France, expecting so much, could hardly believe his eyes.

§4

The King! King Louis of France, "Father of his Country," beloved of his people, scourge and terror of his enemies—who had laid waste Italy, was fighting even the Pope himself, yet whose care of his own land had made him loved and honoured and worshipped by the meanest as by the greatest; no other King ever so wise, so venerated, so powerful, so clement, so rich, so great. . . .

It seemed impossible! This man—why, he was no more wonderful, surely, than Papa Caillette himself; and not so very much more handsome, or more glorious; certainly less to be feared. At first glance he looked stout and unwieldy, but was less so than he appeared, the large pendulous cheeks under the exceptionally low forehead, the big, blunt, ill-shapen nose, the huge, loose, flabby lips, the legs swollen with gout, the somewhat protuberant belly in a frame really attenuated, giving him this illusion of bulk. An odd-looking, oldish man. . . . He must have been nearly fifty, if not more—but they said King Louis always looked older than his years. He was dressed more plainly than some of his glittering Court around him, in blue and brown and grey; a cap of purple velvet, in which were set a few pearls, was on his head; the hair, one noticed, was almost black, and hung in a lank, stiff mane. France noticed with surprise that he wore plain grey worsted stockings and stout black shoes, like any yeoman-farmer. And he had not even a crown!

Truly an odd looking King. . . .

"Why," the boy thought, wondering, "our good King Louis has no top to his head—it looks as if it had been cut off." The brow was so low that there seemed hardly any at all; and, in spite of hanging cheeks and full, loose lips, his face seemed almost fleshless when one looked at it more closely. He was a little like some country farmer whom one meets on a market day haggling over corn or cattle; but any company of farmers, however plain and rustic, might have made him their butt, and cracked jokes about his looks, without flattering themselves much upon their own.

This, then, was the King for whom, when he was sick, weeping crowds had prayed at the shrines of France; the King who, in his wild youth, had fought that great Lady-Regent, Anne of France, and had been vanquished, and had known harsh imprisonment; the King who had won great battles, and lost great battles, and been cruel, and been kind; the King who, so pitiless to foes abroad, at home had said that the King of France could not remember injuries done to the Duke of Orleans—— This odd-looking, rustic fellow, whose dissipations had once been notable, who had played such havoc once with ladies' hearts, who had treated poor ugly Queen Jeanne (whom he had been forced to marry without love) so scurvily—yet now was a model husband to Queen Anne; and said his many prayers at her bidding, and went early to bed, and loved all his people, and ruled so wisely. . . . "*Good King Louis.*"

An ill-made bundle of contradictions, to be sure; just as Loches itself was, where in the *Logis du Roy* were pomp and luxury mingled with simplicities; in the Queen's apartments devotions, charities, plain and wholesome living; and in the cells honeycombing the rock below the Donjon captives hungering, thirsting, shrieking under torture, longing for death. . . .

Yet surely a bundle of contradictions, this old world itself, on the face of which, for a brief tale of years, France Caillette was to play his tiny part.

§5

This grotesque and curious being, set upon Saint Louis' throne under golden lilies on azure gave a sudden order; his voice startled France; it was like the shrill neigh of a horse. Papa, between his guards, was twisted sharply round, and King Louis dropped from falsetto to a hoarse guffaw, while his Court, according to their rank, tittered or laughed outright. One of the archers unfastened the ouche—not without pains to the captive—and held aloft between finger and thumb the tail of the page's pourpoint.

Blood, welling slowly in poor Papa Caillette's ear, fell now and then in a heavy drop on the velvet carpet. He shifted uneasily from one foot to the other, and once nearly fell, so that his guard ran forward to hold him up under the arm-pits. He blubbered at his misery —yet, catching sight of France, winked at him solemnly through tears; the wink said plainly enough: "Boy, your father is playing a part, in misery and pain though he be; all goes well." The wink veiled the little, pig-like eye but for the fraction of a second, and was like the veiling of a bird's eye; so quick, so sudden; yet to France, knowing him, also so significant. His blubbering rose to a child's hullaballoo when it is hurt or slighted. The odd, almost browless face of the King changed curiously; almost as if a beam of sunshine had fallen on it; the change made it very human, strangely kind, so that one forgot at once all his uncouthness. "Poor fellow," said the high-pitched falsetto, "who has maltreated him? Quoqueborne, send for one of our leeches. Is Honorat Picquet here?"

Before Captain Cockburn, of the Scottish Guard of Archers, could answer, Caillette had donned his favourite cloak of crafty simplicity. It might have been a scared child frightened of having out a tooth. "No, no, nenny no," he whimpered, "if I must be killed, let me have a hangman and a scaffold, and die properly. I know these doctors. They take life too easily. When one is at death's door, who but they pull one through? Sire, let me be broken on the wheel rather than on a pill-box; hang me, but do not poison me; nenny no,

let it be the axe and not the scalpel, of your good grace, Sire." He made grimaces of apprehension, and shuddered. "Sire, they have taken my ear and now my tail, and I am like that good-wife who, when she had piled up her great sleeves, and wig, and paint, and wooden leg, puzzled her husband as to which half he should bed with."

The King held in his hand the strip of torn finery, but was not looking at it. He turned to one of the archers who had brought Caillette in, and asked, in his strange, shrill voice now and then dropping to gruffness: "Who nailed this honest fellow by the ear?"

"'Twas the pages' work, Sire. I think, though, there is small damage done."

"A small damage—but, *le diable m'emporte,*" chuckled King Louis, with his favourite oath, "a great ear. . . . A great ear. . . . Which of my pages has done you this wrong, good man?"

"A dozen devils, Sire, carried it away, and left a tail behind me, which your Most Christian Majesty is now pulling." And, a twinge taking him, great tears coursed down his pitted cheeks.

"If you saw them again you would know them? Captain de Nançay, summon the pages who were not on duty this afternoon. I will find out who did the poor fellow this hurt."

Papa closed his eyes, and blubbered again in self-pity. "'Twas my best ear too," he babbled. "When I try to flap it now it hurts."

"Then why try?" asked the King, and laughed, but not unkindly. Caillette's grimaces would have brought a fortune then to any artificer in wood or stone. But he lifted a cautious lid just long enough to drop France another wink. It said: "Boy, all goes finely."

Costard: If ever I do see the merry days of desolation that I have seen—
Armado: Villain, thou shalt fast for thy offences ere thou be pardoned.
Costard: Well, sir, I hope when I do it I shall do it on a full stomach:
LOVE'S LABOUR LOST.

§ I

WHEN the Captain of the Guard had gone out, the King plied Caillette with questions, which he, playing his favourite rôle of crafty simpleton, answered with a wry but foolish countenance to the best of his skill, now and again hesitating and tugging at his ears; whenever in absence of mind he did this the pain of the injured ear made him wince, squeal, and reply in dolorous tones that set other faces smirking. Fool of the Rueful Countenance indeed was poor Charles Caillette. Where was he born? In a bed, Sire, he hoped, as he hoped someday if he lived to die in one. It was somewhere in Touraine, they had told him; but 'twas a wise child remembered his own birth; now that was a droll thought, for other folks to know more of this than the one who had been through it. . . . Touraine was good enough—"*La Vieille France,*" where its Kings lived; the country where, the saying went, God was a good man; the land of fair women and rich wines, some wise person had said of it, and he knew.

This was a shrewd thrust, if perhaps a dangerous; the King himself had spoken thus, when Cesare Borgia while on his queer business which made Louis free of poor Queen Jeanne, had such liking for fair Touraine women and good Touraine wine that he was loth to go away. An unpleasant fellow, this Cesare, with his flushed face, boils and pimples; and a dirty errand he came upon. . . . . But the King was in good humour. . . . If Papa's own Papa was something of a mystery, his mother was certainly daughter of the old Sieur de Villehardouin's Fool; Caillette knew that well enough, though she and his grand-

father were in Paradise these many years—his grandfather had climbed a cart in his eagerness to get there. Eh well, did not Elijah go by flaming chariot? He dropped easy tears over these old, old deaths—there comes an age when being orphaned moves no pity in others. Yet in his grandfather's case a tag of an ancient Perigord song seemed applicable; a pious song, too, which would suit the King well, and Queen Anne better, if she were in hearing. He lifted his voice in a doleful whine, half-hoping that the Queen in her apartments might catch the words:

" Une âme est morte cette nuit,
Elle est morte sans confession.
Personne ne là va voir,
Excepté la Sainte Vierge.
Le Démon est à l'entour,
' Tenez, tenez.' "

Caillette himself stopped; by the glorious St. Gatier, here was fortune! A gentleman in red and black—they were the Queen's colours, and all her male servants even to the turnspits in the kitchens had to wear them—came in hurriedly, and announced the Queen of France. Anne of Brittany followed him closely, three of her ladies, two small pages, one carrying a tiny Breton spaniel, and half a dozen stout Breton guards attending her. No need here for proclamation or announcement —if King Louis, but for his state, might have been taken for some village mediocrity, the Queen could have cried butter or cheese or clucking fowls in any market-place of her rich Duchy—-yes, and in common peasant's cap and dress—and yet have had caps doffed to her, so noble was her voice, so royal her bearing. At least this was what folks said. It was strange how easily majesty sat on her, for nature had shown her no special favour, and as a rule she dressed more simply than any of her ladies. She was a little below middle height. One leg was slightly shorter than the other, and, in spite of the shoe heightened to conceal her lameness, she limped a little as she walked. Her dark brown hair was brushed back in such fashion that hardly a trace was shown beneath the hood, which was of sombre velvet, and similar in

shape to the age-old native head-dress of Penhoet and Labrevack, in her own and dearly-loved Duchy. Her only ornaments were the pearls edging her square-cut bodice, and an ivory cross held by an imitation rope of twisted gold and silver wire. Her dress was grey, edged with fur. She was about thirty, and not beautiful, though flattery had proclaimed her so. The nose was large and dominant, but slightly turned up; an inquisitive nose, wanting to find its way into other people's secrets and business; a nose that indicated aggressiveness, a determination to master and not be mastered if by any means its mistress could have her way. The brow was too high, too broad, too smooth for beauty; the lips set obstinately and tightly; the chin a trifle heavy, and very resolute. But the eyes were quick and intelligent, and by no means unkindly; they were eyes impatient of subterfuge, intolerant of falsehoods and quick to detect them. A woman mulishly obstinate, often narrow and severe, hot-tempered, bitterly resentful of injury or insult, and very, very proud. . . . And yet a woman under no illusion about her own weaknesses and faults; generous, capable even in trifling things, affectionate, loyal, charitable, and genuinely devout. If proud towards man, she walked as humbly with the loved God of her own loved people as any simple village girl who hung tresses in a shrine, or knelt at St. Jean du Doigt before St. John's finger when the fires leapt from the hillside, or trembled in bed because she had left her distaff still loaded on Saturday night after the hard week's work. It was known that she had ordered her Confessor never to absolve her until she had made amends to any, however humble, whom her hot temper had led her to treat unjustly. Almost the greatest sin anyone laid to her charge was that she ate butter in Lent, to keep in countenance the poor country folk of her own Duchy who had no oil. The very austere said that, after all, the best butter in France came from Prèvalage, near Rennes, as the Duchess knew very well; if her diet was simple, she certainly had no great love for fasting. They said too she was somewhat over-dainty at table and would not even dip her fingers in the King's dish, but must have her own.

King Louis rose at her entry, and advanced a step or two towards her, walking stiffly because of his gouty leg. His face lit up, and when he greeted her his voice held a curious tenderness, in which, perhaps, was just a hint of bantering—for at this hour she seldom came without some grievance, and his easiest weapon of defence was light irony when temper brought her to him. In a dozen years or so of marriage they had had many tiffs, but one serious quarrel and estrangement only, when the betrothal of Francis to Claude was proposed; here, easy-going though he was, the King had insisted on his own way.

With great dignity and possession the Queen took a seat beside him on the low dais. Papa Caillette had the most splendid audience in the world; ah, a great lady indeed this, and a head worth twenty of the King's, to be sure. Had his song brought her, as he half hoped it might?

She said sharply to Louis: "What is the new trouble with the pages? They are always in mischief. Rochepot de Clérille here has some tale. I sent him for three of mine who should have waited for me at the Oratory. What did you say, Rochepot?"

The small page to whom she spoke piped out that Captain de Nançay, by the King's orders, had stopped all the pages who crossed the courtyard, but why he could not find out. He had, he said, seen a number of pages drawn up near the entry to the *Logis du Roy*, and the Queen's three missing pages were among them. One of the three was the young Vicomte de Bourdeilles, her especial favourite, who always rode the first mule when she drove out in her litter.

"Louis," said the Queen haughtily, "I have said before that I will not have your officers interfere with my servants. If needs be I can punish them myself."

"My dear," said the King with a droll look, "I well believe it. Your little page who dropped your Book of Hours cannot sit easily even now, and it is a week ago. But neither will I have any good subject who seeks audience turned aside insolently, or maltreated by boys who forget that birth brings not only privileges but duties to the less fortunate. I will hear the whole truth of this business."

Caillette wished he could finish his song; it was certainly one of which this stiff little Duchess-Queen would approve. " Stay, stay, my Son Jesus," the Holy Virgin had said when the soul dying without confession was passing to its doom, " let me have forgiveness for this poor soul." And her Son replied: " How can you ask pardon for one who has not asked it for himself from Me?" " But he has asked it from me," answered the Holy Virgin; and Jesus answered:

" Eh bien? Ma Mère, vous le voulez?
Dans ce moment je lui pardonne."

No small poetic licence was needed to apply it to the hanged grandfather, who, for despicable crimes, had suffered (before crowds of approving onlookers), shrieking frantically to all the community of heaven for mercy and help, to the very end. The Queen, devoted to piety and good works, would certainly favour a man of such correct sentiments as Papa Caillette. . . . He grew less confident now of emerging happily from this adventure. By his outrage on the page, whom he had found asleep on his stomach in the sun, he had managed to secure his audience; but it was at the cost of a good ear, and as yet he had had no opportunity of showing those rare qualities and accomplishments, the exhibition of which, he thought, a certain open sesame to royal favour. King Louis dearly loved a good jester, and never grudged money for an addition to his *Salle des Fous*; indeed, his soldiers and officials sometimes grumbled that they were so much less lucky than his mountebanks and clowns.

But there were the tramp and patter of feet on stone—the snuffle of a small, frightened boy trying to restrain his tears—a scratching at the door, and the arras was drawn back by a man-at-arms to admit Captain de Nançay and his captives.

§2

Two—six—a dozen—at last a round score of pages trooped in. There were little boys of nine, big boys well in their teens. There were tall boys and short boys, fat boys and thin boys, merry boys and solemn boys;

and one little fellow at least on the verge of tears. Three were in the Queen's red and black. Two wore the blue and crimson and white silk lace, and two the blue coats, red vests and breeches and gold lace, which pages of different grades attached to the royal stables wore as full dress. There were a couple in odd little red and gold kilts; these attended the King when he hunted. A page of the chamber was in his magnificent court dress of crimson velvet embroidered and seamed with gold, and half-veiled by a broad web of finest Point d'Espagne lace; a snow-white ostrich plume was in his crimson cap; near him there were other pages of the presence, but in undress scarcely less splendid, of scarlet cloth, covered with gold and silver lace. In the few minutes' grace given them they had evidently done their best to make themselves presentable. One lad stealthily stroked and patted his tousled hair into some semblance of order.

A well-affected surprise, and an assumption of injured innocence, were on almost every face. But some bore themselves with pert indifference; two or three with hauteur.

France Caillette watched these lads, many of them of his own age, with envious and admiring eyes. They represented the aristocracy of France and Brittany. Not one but had his many quarterings, his two centuries at least of noble ancestry. They had been born with golden spoons in their mouths, and he—— But then it was wicked to covet what the good God had been pleased to give to others, and to wish one had so much instead of so little; after all, he had his own small gifts. These lucky boys were being trained to arms, yet perhaps not one of them could turn a treble backward summerset so well, or sing so good a song, or juggle with trenchers and balls and knives, or make plump yokels fall off a bench with laughter at jests and mimicries.

But King Louis, in his high, shrill voice, was questioning his father. France knew how Papa Caillette, when they were alone together (if they came through this business safely) would imitate the squeaky royal voice, breaking now and then into growls and grunts, and the Queen's limping stateliness, and the high-born con-

temptuous airs of some of the lads who looked at him so superciliously, with heads as high as if Paris mud were under their noses.

"We will hear you first, good fellow," said the King; and Papa Caillette slipped into his favourite coat of dull stupidity braided with cunning. To gain his real end, and wear the royal motley even as a buffoon of the kitchens as a first step—a mounting block—from which one day the glittering height of *Fou en titre* might be reached, he must play his cards well, and above all make no needless enemies, but useful friends.

"Sire," he said, "but who are all these fine young gentlemen? By Blessed St. Yves, King Solomon was not arrayed like one of them! Why are they here? And why I? I have not the honour of knowing any of them."

"You are to tell the King," said a guard roughly in a rough whisper, "which of them nailed your ear to the post. Point out those who were present."

A stubby forefinger was raised hesitatingly; wavered and circled; he gave the question up in assumed despair, and tugged absently at his ears, a twinge of pain sharply reminding him again of his hurt. "Body of a great fish, Sire," he said, the sudden squeal over, "did anyone nail my ear to a post? My faith, it feels as if the post had been nailed to my ear rather, and all your Majesty's great castle of Loches with it. Wa, wa, all my life shall I carry this big castle about with me. No, none of these fine young gentlemen was strong enough to do that."

"A truce to this rustic's folly, Louis," said Queen Anne impatiently, "and Glareanus waits to give you your lesson in music. Let me have my three pages and go. If they had aught to do with it, I will see them punished, and the man given a recompense. . . . Galois de Kergournadec——"

A boy in her livery stepped forward.

"Had he anything to do with this outrage, good fellow?"

"No, Most Christian Majesty, he was not there."

"Bourdeilles——"

"Nor he, Majesty."

"Anne de Chastel——"

Another lad in red and black stepped forward; Papa Caillette blinked at him, and again said: "No, no, neither was that good kind young gentleman there."

"You hear what he says, Louis. 'Tis your own pages must have molested him. They are always in broils; you are too easy with them." But when one after another the King's pages were told to stand forth —the little lord of Brion, the Vidâme of Gordes-Simiane, Pardaillan, Montmorency, de la Billardère, de Pourtalès, Charles de Mouy, Raoul de Meilleraye, the Sieur de Soulier and the Seigneur de Morette, Montpeset, a small page of the presence named de Hugheville, Montferrand, Antoine de la Roche-Chandre, who had been sent on Papa's first appearance to bring the Captain of the Guard—when all these and two or three more had stood out to be blinkingly scrutinized, Papa's answer was always the same: "No, Sire, he was not there." Last of all came the tallest of the boys, the pale-faced, snub-nosed, very haughty young Vermandois. Here were lads of the best blood of France, but not one belonged to a House more ancient than this senior page, who in a month or two would receive the belt, sword and dagger, and guerdon of six crowns, tokening the coming out of pageship. He stood there, tall, upright, pallid, his nose very haughtily uptilted, but the tail of his pourpoint pitiably lacking; and again Papa said, in his puzzled voice: "Stomach of an enormous fish, no, he was not there either."

There were smiles on several faces and shoulders almost imperceptibly shrugged. "But, *le diable m'emporte,* a man does not nail his own ear to a post!" said King Louis.

"This good fellow seems simpleton enough even for that," said the Queen severely. She said to Caillette: "Look again."

He gazed round blankly. "No, no, nenny no. Not one did I see. *Jamais de ma vie!* Not one of these gentlemen was there. . . . *Ma foi,*" he added, "neither, coming to think of it, was I there myself." He slobbered over this nervous business, and wiped his mouth with a sleeve.

He had raised the laugh he wanted. But Vermandois,

too proud to accept a lie, blurted out: "Sire, a man does not nail his own ear, nor plaster himself with rotten eggs and mildewed apples, any more than I should cut off my own tail!"

"Aye, lad, but the foxes in the fable did," put in the King. "And if this was cut off I doubt but that all the pages may follow the same fashion."

"I have not advised them to do that, Sire, as Monsieur Reynard did in the fable. But this fellow must have cut off mine while I lay sleeping in the sun, because I had prevented him from forcing his way unbidden into the *Logis du Roy* at an hour inconvenient to your Majesty."

Caillette said: "I may have my say, Sire, too? Once I wanted to see how I looked when I slept, so shut my eyes, but could not see myself, not even with a good mirror. Now I say I did not see this young gentleman nail my ear, and 'tis but fair he should say he did not see me take his tail."

"But you have my tail, which is proof."

"Nenny no, the King has it, which is as good proof that he took it. . . . I wish you had my ear."

"We must grow you another tail, good Vermandois," said the King, "but you are nearly out of pageship. Did you help nail this poor man's ear, yes or no?"

"No, Sire; but I told the pages to deal with him as they pleased," the lad said with a touch of hauteur.

"Then 'tis all a mystery as I said," put in Caillette, "and I think, young sir, if you saw me with your eyes shut you must have been sleeping in the moon. Là, là; 'tis a mystery, but if we put our heads together we may solve it. I have heard of some canons of Paris who put their heads together, and made a very good wooden belfry."

The scrap of torn finery with which the King had been playing lay across the gilded arm of his chair, where he had put it when he rose to greet the Queen. His sight was failing a little, and he had not examined the ouche with any care. But the Queen's sharper eyes were caught by the sparkle of the tiny diamonds, and she took it. "By St. Yves," she said to the King in a half-whisper, "the stones are real—and do you see the device?" They examined closely the small running stag. Turning to Caillette, the King asked with a note

of new suspicion in his voice how the jewel had been come by; and, seeing no escape from the question, yet having no present wish (for private reasons) to say too much, Papa meanly transferred responsibility to France. The boy had watched from the background all that passed. The magnificence of the room, with its rich Lyons carpet, its tapestried walls and cloths of silver and gold instead of daubed wattle or crude painting; the resonance of splendid names in his ears, the rich dresses of guards and pages, the glint of arms, above all the presence of sovereigns famed throughout the known world, who had been speaking to Papa as familiarly as any chance-met folk might do in a hostelry or on the road—all these seemed a gorgeous dream, out of which, at any moment, might come rude awakening. He was brought to earth suddenly. "Ask my boy yonder, Sire; 'tis his ouche, but I think of no value; I found him with it, and took it away. Maybe he picked it up on the road."

"Maybe 'tis not the only thing you pick up on the road," said the King with some sternness. "My officers tell me you say you were at Amboise, where the Duke d'Amboise flung you gold for some show, and that you saw there the Comtesse. . . . This device tells a tale. . . . My friend, remember we have dungeons and Montfaucons at Loches as well as in our Paris."

Poor Caillette, for once in his life, found words fail him. Afterwards he thought of a hundred fine things he might have said. As he paled, and reddened, and stammered incoherently, the Queen touched her husband's arm, whispered, and then made a motion for France to be brought forward. Lisette, huddled in his arms, gave trouble, and the tiny Breton spaniel which now lay on a beaded stool at the Queen's feet sprang up, began to bark, and retreated for safety to its mistress's robes. "Take the monkey away, and the man with it, to the *Salle des Fous,*" commanded the King. So poor Papa Caillette was marched away with Lisette for company; he had achieved so much of his ambition, but with the shadow of punishment and possible death overhanging him. At any rate it was to the *Salle des Fous* and not to a dungeon he was going; as he went out between the guards he grimaced and winked at France, who

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found himself in a clear space before the great Queen, with the great King bending forward to hear what passed between them.

And first of all Queen Anne called to one of the small pages, who carried her great *drageoir* of sweetmeats, and gave France a sugared Brignoles plum from the box. "Now do not be frightened," she said, "because nobody will harm you. . . . By St. Yves, Louis, he is a very pretty boy and bears himself like a little gentleman. . . ." (This was for the King's private ear, but France overheard and flushed under his tanned skin.) "If you tell the truth, boy, you have nothing to fear. You know what speaking the truth means?"

"Yes, your Majesty."

"Now tell us all you know about this ouche," and she touched the pretty, glittering trifle.

France was in a quandary. He remembered the parting winks and grimaces of Papa. If he said more than his father wished him to say, there would be trouble, certainly. And if he said less than the King and Queen ordered him to say, there would also be certain trouble. He knew it was wrong to tell lies; when he told them he always felt uncomfortable and unhappy, and at night dreamed of those horrible demons in the churches, and at day if he entered a church knew that the Mother of God looked at him reproachfully, with sad and troubled eyes.

He had heard the Queen's half-whisper that he carried himself like a gentleman. Well, true gentlemen thought scorn of lying; Vermandois would not shield himself behind falsehood even spoken by another. While he hesitated, the Queen looked at him very kindly, and said: "You shall come with me, and tell me all about it—when your mouth is empty." Because in his confusion he had put the sugared Brignoles plum in his mouth, and it was a very big plum. She took him by the hand, and said in an aside to her husband: "I will speak to him alone. It is strange that he should have seen that woman, and should have the ouche with this crest; we must ask Charles when he arrives. . . . Come, boy."

So, limping slightly, but walking with a great dignity and majesty none the less, this Queen and Duchess who had more wealth from Brittany alone than she well knew

how to spend, and the little vagrant boy whose back was scored with the white weals of Papa Caillette's thrashings, passed from the splendid room, the guards and pages bowing and making way. Her Bretons and her own pages followed her. When her own apartments were reached she bade them wait without, and she and France entered together a little chamber the walls and ceiling of which were decorated everywhere with the cord and ermine which were her emblems. Two small spaniels lay on red and black satin cushions, and in wicker cages were a parrot and love-birds. The room was richly and yet simply furnished; there were carved chests and chairs of black oak, the tapestries depicted scenes in the life of another Anne, Brittany's patron saint after whom the Queen was named; on a table were a number of handsome books; one of them lay open. There were beautiful pictures on the open page, painted in gold, and bice, and vermilion, and green; France wished he could know what they were about—very likely the whole book was full of such pictures.

CHAPTER VI THE HALL OF FOOLS

" I'll swear upon that bottle to be thy true servant."

THE TEMPEST.

§1

ANNE OF BRITTANY AND OF FRANCE, who was fond of children even if sometimes severe with them, did not take long to put the boy at his ease. Women were nearly always good to him, taken by his dark, soft eyes, dark hair slightly curled, regular features, chin still softly rounded by childhood, and quick and graceful movements. His naïve sayings amused them, for they often held quaintly put wisdom, and odd knowledge of a world where he had seen and suffered many things thus early. But he did not know that a Queen and so great a lady could ever be so kind. He thought he had never met anyone kinder, except perhaps his own mother, of whom he had faint remembrance, and perhaps also the innkeeper's wife at Montbazon. This innkeeper's wife, Madame Belatte, was an enormous woman

with vast bosom and receptive lap where twenty children had been mothered; yet her heart was bigger than its tremendous case. People laughed at her, but in good humour, and she laughed at herself, getting up sometimes from her seat when the inn was crowded to offer it to three customers—no less—and once when she missed her very small husband and found him behind her—she could not turn very quickly—she raised a laugh by saying: "Ah, Jules, then you have been taking a walk round the ramparts." Madame Belatte had five chins at the least; her face was always beaming with good nature and good will; France loved her.

No; he was loyal to Madame Belatte, who was never afraid to chide his father for treating him unkindly, and who made every visit to Montbazon a delight. But this new and great and powerful friend, the Queen, unlocked the doors of a strange and beautiful world to the boy. She had brought with her the ouche, detached now from the scrap of silk; but for a time, until all his fear had gone, she did not question him about this. His furtive glance at the picture book had not escaped her; did he like books, then? He had only known three or four in his life, which his father had picked up on their wanderings for a denier or so, and sold again; from these, and from the mottoes and inscriptions on houses and in churches, France had done his best to teach himself to read. He said blushingly that he could not read very well.

"What were the books, boy?"

"Oh, there was one about Solomon and Marcoul—'The Sayings of Solomon and Marcoul,' that was the book's name. I did not understand it, but I learnt some by heart, and then my father took it away. There were pictures in it, but not very beautiful." He knitted his brows, and recited half a dozen lines from memory:

"'*Qui sages hom sera*
Ici trop ne parlera.'
Ci dist Solomon.

"'*Qui ja'mot ne dira*
Grand noise ne fera'
Marcel lui repont."

The Queen looked at him sharply; but he had evidently taken the words at random from those memorized, and in all innocence. "He who wishes to be wise won't say too much here." . . . "He who never says a word will never make a great noise." . . . No, the boy was quite innocent. Anne said: "But that was a book too old for you; Solomon means divine wisdom, and Marcoul human reason; you are too young to understand. And what other books have you read?"

There was, he said, a book of pretty stories; about Little Tristram, and Perceforest, Blanchefleur, Constant, Little Arthur, and Isaiah the Doleful. The mention of Arthur seemed to please her; she told him of the sad fate of a boy-Duke of her Brittany, whose name was Arthur. France was not very clear about the adventures of the heroes of these tales, though he remembered the pictures well enough. He liked a story he had read about one Aucassin and one Nicolete, ancient lovers; it was very pretty. But then there was another book, an old book, which his father said had once belonged to the grandfather who was hanged; that wretched Fool to the old Sieur de Villehardouin. That book he knew almost by heart. It was full of quips and jokes and jests and riddles, and had been thumbed until in places the writing had worn away—because the book was not printed, but written, and very difficult to read now; no one would buy it, he thought, and it was the only book he had ever seen his father study; but Papa Caillette had less learning than France, and could only puzzle it out with his help. Still, they both knew all the jokes by heart.

This jest-book must have held the stock-in-trade of all the fools who ever were—or, indeed, would be—no doubt Adam and Eve whiled away the tedium of their exile by telling such tales, asking such riddles. But France thought them all very wonderful. His face glowed as he told the Queen how these stories made people laugh in the villages and even great houses, and how puzzled they were with the riddles and the catches. For example, Papa Caillette would call up someone on their little stage—when they had one, but it might be only a rude country cart in an inn-yard—and would give him a string of orders: "Tell us the name of your lover,"

"Name and colour," "Name a sum of money," "Say 'Yes' or 'No,'" "Number of mètres," "A colour," and afterwards would tell them that these were answers to a list of secret questions written down in the book; so that a man would perhaps find he had said he loved a woman with blue hair and green eyes, and a nose twenty mètres long; and with a great fortune of a sou; and if he chose "Oui" for his last word instead of "Non" it meant "Yes, I am an imbecile." Roars of laughter always followed the one singled out, as he shuffled back blushing, to his place. There was another catch which made nine out of ten say that cocks lay eggs, and another about a cow shut within high walls—but this, like most of these jests and catches, was very gross. The Queen checked him in one of them, the meaning of which he did not rightly know because, when he asked Papa, Papa could never answer for laughing. She said: "Did he know no moral or edifying stories?" And then told him two or three about the saints, which he thought dull and silly, but was too polite to say so. He was made free for a time of her *drageoir* of sweets. After that she showed him a very wonderful book, turning over the pages for him because his fingers were so sticky; it was a Bible, with marvellous pictures in it of patriarchs and saints, and Balaam's donkey, and God, and the Devil, and in one picture was a little monkey just like Lisette watching Salome dancing before Herod. This reminded him of the monkey in the church watching Susanna at her bath. All were in the most beautiful colours, with much gold. "Oh, I wish I could read better, and write, and paint lovely pictures!" France cried in a burst of confidence. "In that book of my grandfather's there is a story of a Fool who was condemned to death, and he said to the King, who was very devout: 'I have never read the Bible; let me read it through before I die, your Majesty.' 'So you shall,' said the King, 'and it will make you more fit for God's forgiveness perhaps when you come to the scaffold at the end. I promise you that boon, not to die before you read it.' 'By my Faith, then, Sire,' said the Fool, 'I swear I will not so much as open it.' . . . But I, your Majesty," added France ruefully, "might open it

and do my best, but I could never read any but the little words."

"You shall read better one day; though not when your fingers are so sticky," she laughed. "No, no; you may not touch those either," for his eyes had sought greedily other books near at hand. "That is a Breviary for Nobles which my pages have to recite to me; it is by a man named Alan Chartier; but then you are not noble." . . .

"No," he said, a little crestfallen. The Queen was smiling. "Poor boy, but it is not so fine a thing as you deem to be rich, and be potent, and have fine clothes and palaces; God expects more of us, too, when we have those. It is not so fine a thing, little boy." She said this with half a sigh. It was amazing to France that he felt no fear of her, though she was so great a lady and could even cut off his head, no doubt, if she wished. He could speak to her as freely as to any inn-wife on the road, and sometimes they would question him, as she did now, about his Creed, and ask whether he knew his Mysteries, and whether he loved the Saints, and God, and God's dear Mother. . . . But suddenly she took a book from the pile—the page-edgings were turned outwards, and shut by golden clasps—and said: "You would have liked to be noble like my pages; now see these pictures; they are the arms some of them bear. All in this book has a meaning; even the colours have a meaning, and the lines and bars and crosses, and the animals and birds; and those who painted this book knew that they must not put certain colours on others; it is very carefully done. Now look at the colours; this we call or, and that argent, and that bice, and that azure, and that purpure, and that gules; and the green is sinople, from Sinople in Asia Minor, where the Crusaders found the stuff that makes it. This bird is a pelican; she tears her breast to feed her seven little ones, and the drops of blood you see we call in heraldry her 'piety.' Now what is this bird, and do you know what it means?"

"It is a parrot, of course, lady, but I do not know what a parrot means. Sometimes, though, I do"—and France burst out laughing, because he felt quite at his ease and happy—"there was such a funny old parrot at

an inn at Bagneux, and whenever Papa came in it cried out: ' Have some wine, you old *paillard* (boor), have some wine! "

" Well, the parrot signifies eloquence," she said, smiling and not displeased. " Here are some doves, gold on azure; they are the arms of Savoy." Her face seemed to cloud a little. " The doves mean affection between man and wife." The Queen said half to herself: " *Conjugal affection,*" and gave rather a bitter little smile; France only knew later that she must have been thinking of Louise of Savoy, the Countess of Angoulême, whom she always disliked. " All these spread-eagles and the red cross are the arms of Montmorency. Now red in heraldry, which we call gules, comes from the red and purple dyes of the fur worn by the old Crusaders round their necks and wrists. These chabots are of course for Chabot." They were river-fish. " Three golden palms—those are the arms of the du Palmiers, and the red cherry-trees belong to the de Créquys, and you know very well what these are—the three golden lilies——"

" The arms of France! " he cried. " Why, France is my name too."

" It is a splendid name, to be sure; take care of it. Now you know what this little white animal is? The ermine; one of my own badges, for it stands for my own dear country, Brittany. See, this motto says that we must keep it from the lion's power; and this other, that it must always be kept pure and spotless. Pure and spotless, as we should keep our lives." She turned back a few pages, and pointed to a knotted stick which was the King's badge when he was only Duke of Orleans; this badge was a menace to his enemies. Near it was his present device, the porcupine, bristling with quills, and with the motto " From far and near "—" *Cominus et eminus.*" His grandfather had founded an Order called the Order of the Porcupine, and had won a helmet like a porcupine at Creçy; and now King Louis had taken the porcupine for his personal badge, as she had taken the Breton ermine, and the rope of her own Order of the Cordeliers.

And then, with a quick look at him, she showed him

a thistle; under the thistle was the name "Charles Monsieur, Duc de Bourbon." She pointed to a device beneath it on the same page; a running stag! Under this was written "Charles Monsieur," in pencil. Below that was the motto "Penetrabit," which was not on the ouche. He realized suddenly that the Queen was watching his face closely now, and she did not turn over at once, as she had done before, but waited as if expecting him to speak. France coloured self-consciously. Queen Anne took up the ouche, detached the scrap of torn yellow and gold silk from it, and laid the little brooch on the page of the book against the coloured picture. The tiny diamonds glittered and shone blue. The stag was exactly like that in the book. "Now, little boy," she said at last, "you know that we must always say what is true, or the good God and His Mother and the blessed Saints are very displeased, and will punish us severely, be we great or be we small. You have at least learnt that? Besides, it is cowardly to tell lies, and I am sure you would not like to be thought a coward." Her tone changed; she said with a voice of authority, kind but firm, so that he knew he must not disobey even if he wished: "Tell me now what you know of this ouche, and this device."

He hesitated a moment. Well, he must say, and surely there was no harm in saying, but he did not know for the life of him why she was so serious about it all. "My father gave me the ouche to come to the castle in, Most Christian Majesty, before we were turned away. It was to fasten my new doublet. But then, when we were not allowed to see the King, he took it back again. He was so angry he made me take off all my pretty clothes; they are at the inn by the Picoys Gate—*Le Grand Cerf*. I know it is of gold of the standard of the touch of Paris and——"

"The standard of the touch of Paris? By St. Anne, but you talk like a little parrot; who told you that?"

France spoke of his visit to the goldsmith, and of the pretty things he saw there, the golden napkin-box for the Countess of Angoulême, with the Cupids and roses and arms; and the case for playing cards, in silver and blue enamel, with the running stag on it, which the

goldsmith, with a smile and wink at one of his men, had said was the device used by a certain Charles Monsieur. "But I do not know why Charles Monsieur and not Monsieur Charles," said France innocently. "And here again the book says 'Charles Monsieur,' and the stag is exactly the same. Madame, who is this Charles Monsieur who wears his name the wrong way round?"

"He is a very great gentleman, and much too particular to wear anything the wrong way round; a great Prince, and handsome, as a certain great lady" . . . She checked herself suddenly, and went on: "Well, little France, that does not concern you, and he loves his wife, so he does not want any other great lady, even if she wants him. Now ask me no more questions, but answer mine. Had you never seen this ouche before your father gave it you this morning? And did he tell you nothing about it, or how 'twas come by?"

"No, your Majesty; at least——"

"Well—'at least?'"

France puckered up his nose to think after a way he had. "I am not sure," he said doubtfully. "I seem to remember things, and then I don't remember. Now the other day we were at the *Cheval Blanc* at Bléré, and I seemed to remember all kinds of things; a picture of Kings and Dukes playing at cards, and a room we had been in, I feel sure, long and long ago; and a pretty lady who was kind to me and kissed me, and put some jewel or something in my hand, and cried because, I think, she was going away, and leaving me. I was only very little. I asked my father about it, but he would not tell me very much; only he said my mother's name was Simone, and she was always too late, and he said my mother was even too late to be there when I was born, so I had to be born without her. But I know too much to believe *that*. It is Papa's way of making a jest. He expected she died that night in Bléré, and he said she was only too early once; I was born two months after they were married, and before they were married my father had only known my mother two months. I am not sure whether that might be true," he said doubtfully. "He told me a priest was very late as well. . . . But it seems to me I have seen this ouche before with the

little stag, and played with it; perhaps that was what my mother gave me—if she was my mother. . . . I do not think," he went on gravely, "that Papa is afraid of God and Our Lady and their Lordships and Ladyships the Saints, except when he is ill, or very drunk, and so he does not always mind what he says. If he is ill or very drunk Papa is sometimes very religious; oh, a very good man indeed, your Majesty, and makes up such lovely prayers."

She looked at him gently, and told him to hold out his hand for more sugar-plums. "And I will give you a little picture." It was a beautiful little picture, very small, of Our Lady and the Holy Child, and kneeling near her a monk in black, and a monk in greyish-brown; the monk in black looked stern, but the other, who had a little beard, had a kind face, and gentle. "They are St. Dominic and St. Francis."

"Oh, I often say my prayer to St. Francis to aid me," he said. "St. Francis preached to the birds, and called everyone and everything his brother—the sun and the air, the fire and the water, even the donkey and the wolf, and I expect he would have called my little monkey Lisette his sister, though it would be strange for a holy man to have a monkey for a sister. I did see a monkey carved over the altar of St. Hubert's Chapel at Amboise once." But the Duchess-Queen was not listening. She seemed deep in thought. Suddenly she struck a small silver gong near her with a little hammer, and a page entered. "Go find my Confessor," she said, "and come back with him." As the lad went on his errand, she said to France: "I see you are not so ignorant, boy; I will by and by have you taught, perhaps; but now you must go to your father. You shall have your pretty clothes from the inn. I will keep the ouche for the present; it may have been come by honestly; I know this Monsieur Charles whose name is the wrong way round," and she smiled again. "Do not be frightened; no one will hurt you."

A thin man dressed something like St. Francis in the images entered; he had on a cowled frock of greyish brown, sandals, a rope and crucifix swinging at his side; he was tonsured, and had a little brown beard flecked

with grey. This, he knew afterwards, was Yves de Maheuc, who often confessed her. His face was good and kind, and he smiled at France as he passed, so France smiled back. The boy heard the Queen say to the Confessor in a low voice: "What year was it that Louis de Bourbon died—Charles Monsieur's elder brother?"

"He was wounded at Capua, and died there of fever from his wounds soon after, I think."

"Ah! But he was very young."

"In the prime of his youth. He was, I think, six years older than Charles, Madame."

"It is just possible," the Queen said, evidently still deep in thought. She whispered something to the monk, who looked at France with curiosity and interest. "It may be," he said doubtfully. "He is like, certainly, and Louis was gay in his boyhood, and given to worldly things, though 'tis said of him on his tomb in St. Louis' chapel at Aigue-Perse that he is now a citizen of Paradise. . . . No, he did not die at Capua; it was afterwards, at Pozzuola; I forgot. That was late in 1501. He must have been then between seventeen and eighteen; he was but thirteen when he inherited, though they say his old nurse predicted then that Charles would be Duke." Again he looked hard at France.

The Queen said: "Rochejacquelin, take this boy to his father in the *Salle des Fous,* and give order that he be well treated, and go about freely within reason; I will see him again when I have time. His things and his—father's—are to be brought from *Le Grand Cerf* and given them. And now, boy, remember; this little animal here, the ermine of my own dear country, carries a motto too; the Latin is '*Potius mori quam foedari,*' but that you will not understand. It means 'Better die than be soiled.' And unless anyone will it in his heart, he need not be soiled for all the soiling things there are in the world; remember that. I will not forget you, though I have many things to think about."

§2

He and young Rochejacquelin went out together. France clutched sugar-plums in one hand; he offered some to the Breton, who refused rather curtly. Well,

they would do for Lisette. It would have been difficult to find a greater contrast than there was between the two boys thus, for a few minutes, thrown together; the young Breton noble of many quarterings and great estate, but coarsely featured, short, bullet-headed, thickly built; the boy whose birth was dubious, but who was ostensibly at least the son of a country clown and sot, tall for his years, his limbs exquisitely fashioned and trained further from childhood by the necessity of his trade to a litheness and quickness and grace which cheap, garish clothes could not conceal, his face a perfect oval, the eyes so dark, so soft, so luminous, the teeth, when he smiled, showing how crusts and rough fare had whitened them better than any chemist's stuff, the colouring of his cheeks and delicately formed lips such that any Court "Maker of the Queen's Face" might have made a fortune from the recipe, had it been for sale. Take his glittering costume from the page, clap it on France Caillette, and in the whole bevy of royal pages there would have been none as handsome, as graceful. The Queen had thought that.

If the sugar-plums were curtly refused, Rochejacquelin, really an amiable little fellow, soon unbent, and the two boys chattered gaily enough as they made their way to the Martelet, where (the page said) the Fools, mountebanks, apes and parrots, as well as some of the baser servants, had their quarters. The category did not flatter, but then France, had he known, might have consoled himself with the thought that great commanders bracketed together in contempt savants and asses. They passed through courtyards, over a little wooden drawbridge, and through a postern. The Martelet was one of the newer buildings, erected or at least finished only a few years back; it was built on the living rock, which was honeycombed below with prisons far remote from sunlight. Long before the tower was built on older ruins these prisons had been places of refuge. In one of the cells, Rochejacquelin told France, Ludovico Sforza was confined. Their way lay through a small inner courtyard; then came another postern, and at last they were at the entrance to the *Salle des Fous*.

And first an indescribable pandemonium of sound met

their ears, as if one were entering the refractory wards of a mad-house, where hundreds of poor maniacs were shouting, singing, yelling, laughing, screaming, and scores of warders bullying and giving noisy orders for the others to be quiet. Mixed with all this were the barking and growling and snarling of dogs, the gibbering of apes, the bark of a falcon now and then, the harsh screaming of many parrots. And, on the heels of the din, came a stench almost over-powering as one plunged into it. The smell of packed humanity, unwashed for years and sweating in the heat—the smell of dogs, apes, parrots—of rancid oil, of garlic, of latrines, of a thousand evil odours blended, made France almost sick, and young Rochejacquelin was careful before entering to pinch his blunt nose with his fingers, though, to be sure, the *Logis du Roy* itself (like all the royal palaces) was not scented like a garden of cloves or roses. France's spirits sank; a cell deep in the rock, and solitude, would be better surely than this. And how much better the blue sky above with the birds singing and flying so that their shadows flecked the fields below—and green, luscious woods with grassy rides passing through them in a silence unbroken save by the drone of insects and bird-song—and gentle rain pattering, or the wild dunes and the sea to which their wanderings had once brought them.

To his father evil smell and evil sound had never signified much; his great ears and small red nostrils had always seemed blunted to them, save for purposes of his trade; they were fine things of course to raise a laugh about among the boors at the inns. France remembered one jest which always set folk laughing, about a drunken man vomiting (Papa acted this to perfection) and a friend, who was of course France himself, asking: "Good man, do you not feel well?" to which the answer was: "Well? Never better, by St. Julian; *jamais de ma vie*. I am doing this for fun." Then there was another about a girl who ate so much garlic that seventeen of her lovers died after kissing her. A sour, snappy dwarf in the *Salle* interrupting him, he retorted with a tale of the dwarf's big, shrewish wife hitching him by his hose to a peg to keep him from mischief while she was out. Most of the jests were coarser than these, but

Papa and the *paillards* he amused knew very well that there are few things more comical on earth than an evil smell. It was as funny as a mother-in-law, and almost as funny as a man deceived by his wife, or a priest who lived with a housekeeper and her daughter.

Rochejacquelin said: "Your quarters are to be here just now, but the Queen's orders are that you may have reasonable freedom to come and go, until she is ready to see you. At present your father may not pass beyond the drawbridge, under penalty of death. I am going now to tell the Captain of the Martelet."

With shuddering disgust France surveyed his new surroundings; but he was luckier than poor Papa. And Lisette? But before he could ask the page had gone. There was a dim light in the *Salle*—never well lighted, and now evening was falling fast. On a bench lay a twisted creature on its stomach; it looked up, and the face was hideously distorted; this, like the dwarf who had put in a caustic gibe, was one of the little monsters which at pageants made sport for the King and his friends. Another stunted and misshapen creature, with a shaggy beard almost to its knees, and hardly any legs below the knees at all, was engaged in violent quarrel with a giant; spitting and cursing, with saliva flowing down its beard, the dwarf was far too active for his more powerful but slow-moving adversary, whom he taunted with being a huge snail to be eaten, while he lunged at him with a blunted dagger, and evaded his blows with the most agile turns and twists. Dogs yapped at their heels as they span round, but now and again forgot the combatants, and turned snarling and snapping on one another. On an iron ring a yellow cockatoo was flapping its wings and screaming: "*Vive le bon Roy Louis! Vive! Vive! Viv-e-e!*" A fellow in motley was teaching a grey parrot to say "*A bas le Pape!*" and a string of Italian oaths. There was a huddle of small monkeys on a high perch, searching in each other's fur. "Lisette!" he cried, holding out one of the sweets the Duchess had given him; and she came swinging down a rope to him, grimacing and turning to show sharp little teeth at her companions; she huddled in his arms.

And there, in a far corner, was his father with a flask,

and very happy. "Ah, France, my boy," he cried, "we are in clover at last, for I believe the King means us well after all. He will be a glorious master to serve, and your Papa Caillette is not the man to step on a rung of a ladder without going to the top." He stopped to swear at a sour-faced fellow near him, in parti-coloured yellow and red, and with a cap on which were two colossal ears of an ass, who reminded him that ladders led sometimes to noosed ropes. With a "Chut!" of disbelief and contempt, and a foul gesture, Papa Caillette —already half drunk—cried "A Health to Good King Loys, and confusion to all his enemies! May he lock up the Holy Father with St. Peter's own keys, and strip the silk hose off Italy's leg! Stomach of a colossal fish, it is our good King and his armies that will jump on Italy's toe as well as dance on her belly before many days; he will have the Milanais and Naples also. Long live King Loys, the Father of his People!" He said in an undertone into the wide mouth of his flask: "By St. Brice's sinews, only a lusty fellow could be Father to millions of souls! I was no weakling in my youth, as St. Gatier the Glorious knows well enough, but millions —Faith, that is beyond an amateur." . . . He drank.

CHAPTER VII THE MOTET IN D

"Canto con ronca voz y lamentabile" (I sing with a loud and melancholy voice).

CASTELLANOS.

§ 1

SCARCELY a wink of sleep did France have in his new quarters, though for the first time he slept in the palace of a King. But so, for that matter—or under a King's palace—did unhappy prisoners, like that once-great Duke of Milan, Ludovico the Moor, to whom after nine dreary years, joy and death came hand in hand, as they may come more often than we think. Night was hours old before any peace of night came to the *Salle des Fous*. Some squabbled, some played tarots by the light of an ill-smelling lamp of wicks floating in a tray of rancid oil, some ate, tearing like beasts at their meat and gnawing the bones with disgusting grunts of satisfaction

—and all seemed to have drink in plenty. Papa soon reached his stage of garrulity; he drew an audience round him to listen to his jests and tales, his riddles and songs. He pressed France to join him as when they were on the road, but the boy was tired and wretched, and forgot his cues, so that by and by his father sent him flying with a cuffed ear, and continued by himself. At least the audience was appreciative, and one fellow in motley—some Kitchen-Fool or other, doubtless—nearly choked himself with laughter, and said that Papa was funnier than any Master-Fool he had ever seen or heard of, and he hoped he might come to a better end than seemed reserved for him—because, said he, rumour had gone round that King Louis had found him out in a theft from a certain very great Prince or noble—some said even a Prince of the blood—which meant undoubtedly the wheel or rope. In such a community rumour travels very fast. Then three or four fellows from the French Guard drifted in; they wore the fleur-de-lys on their breasts and on their backs the Crown over three towers, which were the arms of Loches, and they carried bows and great shining axes. One of these also made melancholy-merry over Papa's future fate; he told (winking at the company) terrifying stories of others before Papa whom the King had sent to the *Salle des Fous* in custody, to torture them the next day in the torture-chambers of the Martelet. With great relish he described the gruesome instruments the torturers employed. A bird had said something about a certain ring or ouche—he was not sure what it was, but all Loches was talking—and he advised open confession, though even that might come too late. True, King Louis was too kind-hearted to deal quite so severely with the suspected as his cousin, the last King Louis, had done, but perhaps that old Spider was less cruel than he was painted. . . . Another Guardsman said the Eleventh Louis had a heart of leather, but the first speaker said: " By Our Lady of Cléry, no! " and cited the case of an aged relative of his whose fowls had been taken for King Louis the Eleventh's dinner on one of his progresses; the King had made careful note of their value on his tablets, and repaid all. . . . But he was

merciless with offenders, and had they tongues the stones of Loches and of Plessis-les-Tours could tell tales. He urged Papa Caillette to be on the safe side and make a preparation for a good death before he slept, even if there was no harm in a little merriment first. At all events, and at the best, he must certainly expect a good torture. King Louis was so kind and gentle that, unlike other Kings, he never permitted torture of a man more than once—but then it was not always necessary; once tortured was sometimes as good as once dead.

Papa Caillette was almost too full of wine to pay heed, just now. He had still money to spend, and (he hoped) no bill to look forward to at the *Grand Cerf* by the Picoys Gate. And then he was the King's guest. But the soldier's words rankled; he was a fellow who did not know how to have his jest and be done with it. It sickened one to hear his stories of merciless cruelties done by this same good King on his enemies in Italy; though, to be sure, Louis was not the Father of the Italian people, but only of his own. "By St. Christopher's arquebus," broke out Papa at last, "I am not the man you think me, to be frightened by tales. We gentlemen of the road know a thing or two, and a sharp tongue is as good and ready a weapon as your *hache* to defend oneself with. '*Il tiens tout le savoir humain*' was a legend borne by the Fool in a great pageant at Paris I have heard of, and 'tis true." He began to grow angry, but the soldier tossed off his drink, laughed, and went out with his comrades, turning at the exit to wave a hand and say: "Good-bye, Papa Fool, till our next meeting, which will be long ahead, for I think to-morrow night you will be making devils laugh in hell; and there's so poor a cellar in that place to wet one's whistle at, I shall not hurry to get there."

In that little story of Aucassin and Nicolete, the lovers, which France knew and loved, Aucassin—(he remembered)—discussed Paradise and Hell, and said that he cared not for Paradise without Nicolete his very sweet friend, because to Paradise went only aged priests, and the cripples and maimed who coughed before altars and in the church crypts, and those who died of wretchedness; but in hell were fair knights slain in tourneys and

wars, and stout archers, and courteous ladies who had other friends than their wedded lords. But he knew hell was not pleasant like that. He knew it was full of hideous, unhuman beings like those frozen into stone on church walls. It seemed to him now that it might be something also just a little like this *Salle des Fous,* with the gibbering of many apes and squawking and screaming of parrots and such-like birds never ceasing, but going on for ever, instead of lovely music of harpsichord and psalters and rebecs and perhaps the organs; and monsters such as those around him, only far more hideous and terrible, instead of angels with fleecy wings; and coarse, strident voices always using foul words and oaths, and going on day and night; and horrible, sickening smells. There was Papa, travelling fast towards "Martin-drunk" and so no doubt to "Lion-drunk," when he would become violent and dangerous; but Papa had been frightened more than he pretended by what the soldier had said. He bragged for all that of knowing a dozen ways to turn aside a King's wrath should he be really angry; was there not one Fool who, when his lord, the Duke of Muscovy, was about to sentence him had prayed: "Sire, I beg you to grant me but one bequest," and when that was denied, as he knew it would be, had said: "Sire, I beg you to send me to the scaffold?" And was there not another who had asked only that he might choose the manner of his death, and, this being granted, had chosen to die of old age in his bed? Oh, there were a dozen ways. There was nothing to fear; besides, the ouche was honestly come by, and if anyone was the thief it was those who had taken it from him. And just then their things were flung in from *Le Grand Cerf,* the bringer grumbling not a little at their weight. No one would bother about letting a man have his best clothes to hang in.

To tell the truth, France was a little frightened himself. He had curled himself up with Lisette in some straw, none too clean; dark as it was, it was quite light enough for fleas and worse creatures to see to bite. He was tired; his limbs ached; he yawned again and again, but sleep would not come. Loches was cruel; and very, very, very old, even though the walls that actually shut

them in were not long built—indeed, the stones of which the walls *were* built had, many of them, come from walls quite ancient; so that what now knew cruelties knew cruelties long, long ago—yes, these very stones had heard cries of agony and death, and ghosts of tortured and slain men must be everywhere. Over their heads were two stages of massive masonry holding their new secrets to-day; beneath them, in the rock were prisons filled with miseries and terrors. And within the ramparts of this grim and terrible Loches were towers, cachots, crypts, subterranean passages, torture rooms, skeletons. With a shudder now he remembered the immense, frowning gateway with its vast rounded and crenellated towers which had not seemed at all terrible in sunshine, and the Donjon so gloomy, so tremendous, that even in sunshine it filled one with dizziness and awe. There the invincible strength, the cold cruelty, the austere and forbidding menaces of age-old yet age-less death seemed to have their stronghold. He tried to turn his thoughts to the Queen; she had been very kind, and had given him leave to go about with some freedom, and had promised not to forget him. So near yet so far away were lovely things; painted books, music, bright dresses, boys joyous in youth and health, ladies with beautiful and pleasant faces. . . . Papa fell asleep at last, snoring, gurgling in his throat; he had vomited all down his doublet and hose. Men and monstrosities and birds and beasts less repulsive than men lay together in rushes and straw. A man dreamed of gains and losses at cards; one heard him mutter: "*Roy*——" "*Valet*——" "*Trèfle*——" "*Pique*——" By and by France fell asleep.

§2

Papa was not allowed to go beyond the confines of the Martelet; he fumed at this, but finding argument useless reconciled himself; and took the air and his flask in the little courtyard, where France to his delight could see the blue sky stretching to infinity beyond the towers—so high, and yet under that sky so small—and could see passing birds and hear their song now and then; there was even a tiny garden of flowers planted in a corner of

the court by some warder. This world where God made beautiful flowers, and never forgot after he had packed away their colours every night where to put them when morning came, could not be altogether cruel and dreadful; nor one where God made lovely little feathered birds, and taught them how to sing and make nests, and lay eggs painted and speckled with a brush ever so delicate, and had His eye on every one. A tiny egg which might have been a fragment dropped from the pale blue edge of the sky itself still lay in a sheltered corner of the garden; France picked it up, and it seemed to him a message from heaven. Anything beautiful made him feel funny all over; he could not understand it, and when once he tried to explain this to Papa, and asked if everyone felt so, Papa laughed, and said only three things made him feel a thrill like that; wine, and gold, and plump, jolly women. Slim women were good enough for him when he was young, he added with a sigh.

Caillette played dog in the manger at first over the boy's comparative freedom; if he might not go out, then, Stomachs of a million fishes! the boy should not go either, but should keep with him in the Martelet. But curiosity to know how matters really lay mastered him. France made friends easily; people and animals all took to him; well, he should be the liaison with a wider world. Let him keep fingers on his tongue, fingers on his ears, fingers on his eyes. He might talk if he said nothing. He might see if he was careful not to let others see that he saw. He might listen and pick truth from silly and empty rumour. He was to be Papa's spy, seeing how the land lay, and what prospects of corn and milk, honey and grapes, were for them in the Promised Land, so near—and still so far away. But, by St. Gatier the Glorious! nobody must suspect that he was not guileless. If they found he was spying, the King would cut his head off (Papa passed a blunt finger across his own throat—so!) and no doubt afterwards send him to the dungeons for life; and Papa himself would show him that his hand had not lost its cunning with stick or strap. Thousand thunders, how would he like to be in a dungeon without his head on, and unable even to sit down? Eh-h?

So, within the confines of Loches, the boy was free to wander; though certain doors were closed to him. It stood, on its enormous base of rock in the plain of the Indre, a city vast and to all intents impregnable, towering over and dwarfing the huddled hamlet at its feet. Here the Counts of Anjou had ruled with a strong hand —Fulke the Black, who shut in here and strangled the Lord of Saint-Aignan; Geoffrey Plantagenet; Richard Cœur de Lion; and here (strange contrast) Charles the Seventh and his "Lady of Beauty," Agnès Sorel, had dwelt and loved each other very much. Not far from the great gateway, exit from which was forbidden him, was the Collegial Church of Nôtre Dame, or St. Ours as they began to call it, where in ice-cold marble, with the wings of angels guarding her, and two little fleecy lambs at her feet, she lay in effigy, the hands pressed together in an age-old prayer. He could puzzle out most of the inscription:

"Cy gist noble damoyselle Agnes Seurelle en son vivant dame de Beaulte de Roquesserie d'Issoulden et de Vernon sur Seine piteuse envers toutes gens et qui largement donne de ses biens aus eglyses et aus pauvres laquelle trespassa le lXe. jour de fevrier lan de grace MCCCCCXLIX, priies Dieu pour lame delle, Amen."

This was centuries after the Plantagenets, yet was itself an old tale. Some said that hundreds of years before even the Angevin Counts and Kings Loches was both fortress and palace. Some said the Romans built a stronghold here. The King's leman, beautiful herself, and "Lady of Beauty" from her fief Beauté on Marne, was now but dust and a tradition of kindness and loveliness; through the long years she prayed, who had been piteous herself towards all men, that God might pity her own frailty, and be merciful. And King Charles who loved her was another ghost of Loches; dead long ago, some said from very fear of dying.

As on some great pillow of rock, lace-workers working not with threads but with stone which became web lawn and gossamer under their deft hands had made this chapel marvellous—yet, to France, sometimes terrible as well; grotesques were everywhere, within the chapel and

without. Over the rounded doorway fearsome beasts looked down—perhaps vast heads only, perhaps complete and often distorted figures of beasts, many unknown even to the bestiaries. From capitals in porch and *salle* and tower there watched human heads, and creatures semi-human huddled in company; tiny bearded men, laughing, jeering, snarling, lacrymose; often with the bodies of beasts and wings and talons of birds. But more terrible than anything at Loches was that stupendous Donjon, so huge that giants might have piled its stones together, and built its colossal walls, and even now at night might peer through its tiny apertures, from which so many eyes had looked out, watching over the land it dominated. It stood, a vast rectangle, clear-cut and massive against the sky; with rectangular towers supporting it, and other spur-towers near, some of which now in full summer were pink with *joubarbe,* leafed with creepers. Almost at the summit a tiny Chapel was hidden—the Chapel of St. Salleboeuf, as if in this tremendous body a heart once beat which knew that not only force and strength and menace and immensity mattered in the world. But the Chapel was now difficult of access, and no longer used.

The Donjon, on a promontory of the rock, was a castle by itself. France wandered almost unchecked in the still summer air; from the terraces and ramparts he could look over miles and miles of open country—even Beaulieu Abbey, ever so far away, was distinctly visible, so clear was the light. There were woods, brooklets, the river, the Indre marshes; cultivated fields and farmsteads showed the prosperity that good King Louis had brought to his subjects; and far beneath him lay the town of Loches with its own walls and towers and gates, and ancient houses and inns jostling together, and belfries and spires. From some vantage points he saw men and women like ants far below. It seemed that if he stretched out a hand far enough, he could pick them up in finger and thumb: A peaceful landscape; yet far away in the forest sounded faintly a cry of which he had learnt on his wanderings the dread significance; it was the distant "*Hallali! Hallali!*" of the huntsmen—the terrible kill cry. In some brush thicket, in some

green glade, the hunt was finishing its business, and a boar perhaps or gallant stag yielding up the life for which it had made the last valiant fight. France wondered dimly why the good God, who loved the world and made it so beautiful, had set gins and traps and suffering in it everywhere.

But he was forgetting Papa's instructions. . . . He went to the great courtyard and drew shyly near a group in the shade of the huge chestnut. Here soldiers and serving-men idled; some slept or dozed, some were talking. Three of the Scottish Guard sat apart, they spoke in their own uncouth tongue, so there was little to learn from them; but one of them was the young Scot who had spoken to him in friendly-wise the day before, and, noticing him, the Guardsman nodded and smiled, so France took heart of grace and smiled back. Certain words in French were mingled with their talk; he guessed they spoke about the Italian wars. By and by two or three of the French Guards joined them, and the talk was half in French, and half in Scottish. It seemed that King Louis was very busy with plans; as soon as certain matters in France were arranged he intended to go to Italy, though not yet. Great names, some of which he had heard on their wanderings as names in another and grander world, and some only coming into renown, were mentioned now and then; Cardinal Georges d'Amboise, who was not long dead, and whom all wished alive again; Antoine Duprat; Lescun; François de Rohan, Archbishop of Lyon, now at Loches; Lautrec; the Emperor Maximilian; Robert Stuart of Aubigny; Pope Julius . . . one of the soldiers laughed about the Holy Father, saying he might be bought off for quince jelly, of which he was inordinately fond; he was a good fighter no doubt, and would go a-warring even from his litter—but a pig for food and drink. Another answered: "Ah, but one must have heed even of pigs; Prince Philippe, the son of our King Louis le Gros, was killed long ago by falling over an Abbot's pig when he was riding through the Rue St. Jean, and so did not come to the throne; these church pigs may be dangerous." But a Scottish Archer crossed himself, and told him roughly to heed

his words. Then there were Florimond Robertet, the Treasurer-Secretary; Trivulzio, with his curly white hair and snub-nose; the Duke of Venice and his Ambassador; Etienne Poncher; the new English King; and Bourbon—at which name France pricked up his ears. But he heard little enough; they spoke only of something the King had said of him, that he wished his cousin Bourbon were of a less taciturn and more gay and open spirit for a young man; stagnant water was dangerous and frightening. Before long the French Guards turned from serious talk to talk of plunder, and amours in Italy with pretty girls there, and there was a great deal of laughter, and some bad stories they told. But the Scottish Guardsmen were more serious than the others, and seemed to hold themselves rather proudly aloof; by and by they separated from the rest. France went away. In the *Salle des Fous* he found his father with boon companions, and in a merry mood; his head, he said, was still on his shoulders, and likely to be so, he hoped; a good fellow had told him that the King and Queen were going to Blois for a day or two, and were much too occupied to concern themselves just now with his affairs. At dinner time one did not want to have to run about after one's own head in order to find a mouth to stick knife and food in; yes, there were difficulties in losing one's head, by St. Lucy! Hanging was also unpleasant, but had its advantages; a stretched neck, now—why, the giraffe might take but a cup of wine, and feel as much joy in it as short-necked fellows took in twenty as it trickled down. So hanging might not be so bad if one were not hanged too seriously. A man he knew had quarrelled with his wife, and went out threatening to hang himself in despite; she found him with the rope round his waist. "Wretched woman," he cried when she found him, "your tongue has at last driven your poor husband to this extremity." "But là! là! to hang oneself round the waist?" she replied; and he, very sensibly: "Do you think me such a fool as to hang myself round the neck? I tried it, but the rope was very uncomfortable, and I had difficulty in breathing." In one hand Papa flourished a well-gnawed bone, in another a bottle of red wine, and a

boule of excellent bread shook on his knee. There were but two animals he envied; the giraffe for its neck, the camel for its seven stomachs. But to be a camel one should keep on good terms with St. Mamer, who cured stomach-aches; by St. Denis's Horses! he would not like to have seven stomach-aches all at once. . . . As he was in a good humour, France ventured to say slyly that he thought perhaps the seven stomachs of a little camel, or even of an enormous camel, would be a finer oath than the stomach of a little or even enormous fish. Papa clapped him on the shoulder, excellently pleased. "'Tis an oath I will make his Majesty laugh at one day," he said. "Meanwhile, so long as he does not forget my food and drink, I do not mind his forgetting me. He who travels slow travels sure; and 'tis no good running up with a halter before you know 'tis a cow they are giving you." He was not annoyed, for a wonder, that France had discovered nothing. When they had finished the meal, France went out again, leaving Papa on all fours, engaged in a barking and snarling contest with a small and noisy spaniel in the rushes; its teeth had scratched his nose. There was a quiet corner of the ramparts France had noticed; he went there to lie and dream undisturbed, and perhaps sleep.

§3

On soft grass he lay there, one afternoon some days later, on his back with the blue sky above him, and white clouds here and there like islands, or like battlemented castles of snow; and in his ears the song of birds and drone of insects. If it were not for the horror of night, and a fleeting wish that now and then he might go out and see his old friends of the road—that very fat Madame Belatte at the inn at Montbazon most of all, because he loved Madame Belatte very much, and once when very small had made her and her little husband and several of their children roar by saying how beautiful she was and that he would marry her too when he grew up—if it were not for these things, he might stay at Loches in good content for ever. Not once had his father thrashed or kicked him; not once had he missed food or drink. And he began to make friends in Loches as he made friends

easily everywhere, without conscious effort to make them, being little brother of everyone and everything, human and beast, and bird. The King and Queen were back from Blois, where they had been to inspect the new buildings, and to talk to the master-mason about his work. France was not molested by the pages, who for the most part ignored him in his coming and going. Once young Rochejacquelin even stopped to show him a new little arquebus with which he hoped to do much execution in the forest, and was quite friendly and sociable, and not at all proud. The soldier who had frightened Papa with horrible stories gave him a grin and wink when he passed. Then there was the young Archer of the Scottish Guard, a tall, dark, freckled, handsome lad whose name, France found, was Maclean; when they met he had always a friendly word, and one morning gave him a great juicy Madame pear to eat, and chatted to him in his uncouth French about Scotland, his country. He said that there was no land in the whole world so beautiful, nor could any discover one for all their sailors' talk. Edinburgh, its capital, which in France they called Lislebourg, was the most famous and wonderful city in all the world, worth twenty Parises; he was fain to see its old Market Cross again, and the Palace on the great rock. And Touraine and the Blésois (or perhaps even Edinburgh) were not to be compared for a moment with the Highlands of Scotland, where his uncle was a Chieftain with more power than any Emperor or King. If King Louis's porcupine was prickly and dangerous, so was the holly of the Macleans; and if the Bourbons had their thistle, so had Scotland, which none dare touch with impunity. If France could eat their porridge and haggis and Scottish cakes he would turn up his nose at French Kickshaws for ever after. Maclean seemed prouder even than any of the French and Breton pages, but he was very kind to France, and they fast became very good friends.

And now France chanced to make still another acquaintance, who changed the whole course of his fortunes, as an acquaintance who does not at first seem very important may sometimes do in this strange world. Papa in one of his edifying moments had said that you

could climb any ladder by starting at the lowest rung; if you got to know a turnspit, you might get to know the cook; if you knew the cook, you might know perhaps very soon one of his patrons; if you knew his patron, by degrees, mounting step by step, you could know little lords, and great lords, and at the end even the King, and be hail-fellow-well-met perhaps with him. It was not quite true, but there was truth in it. Men had risen to rank and wealth in this way. But France had no thought of anything beyond the minute when Glareanus the King's master-of-music came into his life.

France was so happy this glorious summer morning —the skies were so blue, the air was so sweet and warm and fragrant in the height remote from the squalor of the crowded Château, the grass was so soft and smelt so fresh and cool, and the melody of birds was so delightful. He began to sing himself. And first, being both born and trained to be a mimic, he imitated the notes around him as best he could, in little trills and ripples and coos and whistles as if he were a nest of divers song-birds in an eyrie above that foul nest of ninnies in which he spent his nights. From these joyous imitations he passed to certain songs from his repertoire, bawdy songs many of them, half the meaning of which the boy did not know. When he sang them on the road very often his innocence, and the purity of his voice, gave a piquant sauce to the fare which boorish audiences gulped down. There was a very naughty song about soldiers and a woman at an inn, and still another of a Lord and Lady going to supper the end of which always brought a roar of laughter by its sudden surprise; sometimes these songs had a political significance which France knew nothing about; like that scurrilous old song about the wedding-night of the Duke of Valentinois, Cesare Borgia, whose name was not loved in France. From these, by way of a drinking song or two which brought in pot-bellies and red noses, he passed by an odd transition to scraps of hymns and processional chants—and was in the midst of one of these, singing it with all his heart and soul in a complete unconsciousness, when Glareanus came upon him.

The musician stopped in amazement. For a minute,

so softly had the new-comer's footsteps fallen on the grass, France did not notice him; the boy checked his song and flushed with embarrassment to find an auditor. Glareanus had an immense mane of black frizzled hair, lively little eyes which were almost sloe-black, and a well-rounded stomach on extremely thin, short legs; these things caught the eyes first. His voice was like a clear, resonant bell rousing from dream, or mingling with it. He was a musician in love with his art, and had little to learn about music which anyone in the known world could tell him. And when he found a fine voice he knew what he had found, as a pearl-hunter a pearl among oysters.

The royal singing-boys under his charge were the pride and worry of his life, and lately they had driven him almost to desperation. Only that morning two of the boys who showed most promise had failed him; the voice of one had broken at a critical moment and spoilt one of his own most lovely compositions; another had appeared spotted like the pard, threatening the whole choir with disaster. They did not know what the spots signified, and sent the child away. And next day one of Glareanus's famous Motets was to be sung in the collegial church; by all ill-luck, the very Motet in which King Louis himself had insisted on taking part! It was terrible. The great ambition of the King's father, Charles d'Orléans, was to become the foremost poet in France. The great ambition of King Louis recently had been to distinguish himself as a musician: he was always dabbling in one art or another, without real capacity, and with the most elementary taste. He had, however, flattered his chief musician by admiring some of these Motets, and announced his intention some time back of taking part in a performance which the Queen herself would attend.

There seemed an insuperable obstacle; apart from the King's vocal limitations (when he spoke it was like the shrill whinny of a horse, varied with hoarse grunts and growls) he did not know one note of music from another. But Glareanus, where music was concerned, was not a man to be daunted by trifles. He undertook to write a Motet especially for his Majesty. A simple melody for the boys was written, and for the King's part the tenor D,

without variation, on which his Majesty could drone the strong bars up and down on D to his heart's content. For some days past he had practised this in every spare minute; the King's "D" had become a familiar jest in the *Logis du Roy*. And now the day before the great day had come —and two of the wretched little choristers could not take part. Everything would be ruined; the Queen disappointed, the King vexed and perhaps furious. Glareanus had torn his long, frizzled Italian hair with as desperate an energy as Papa Caillette, in his utmost perplexity, had ever put into the pulling of his great ears; the little legs had carried the rotund body everywhere in a whirlwind of agitation. And here was a way of escape. This boy was a discovery; there was not such another boy's voice in Loches, Blois, Amboise, Verger, or even in the twenty chapels of the Tournelles and the other royal chapels in Paris; by the body of Bacchus, no.

He rapped out a few questions; whence did he come? Who were his parents? but was too excited to wait for an answer. France found himself rushed off to a room in the *Logis du Roy* where several boys of different sizes, but most of them smaller than France himself, were just assembling; they wore the blue of the chapel choir; the men-singers wore white velvet and gold. Could he read music? No? The great Ut, Re, Me in the enormous illuminated book poised on a kind of easel and turned at intervals by a tiny boy were all Greek to him; yet he was allowed to listen while the others sang, Glareanus keeping a small, quick dark eye on him at intervals; now "Sing, boy!" came the command when the others were silent. Oh, by ear he sang well enough; a tune and even words heard twice or thrice were sufficient. So he sang with the rest, glorious music—he thought—though Glareanus was never satisfied but kept storming and dancing and clapping with his hands, and stopping them and starting them all again with his wand. At last they reached the time for the great Motet, and the King came in with his attendants. Louis wore a blue cap, a brown quilted coat with indigo blue sleeves, and, drawn up to his hose, grey woollen stockings, he had on, as usual except on state occasions, rough, black blunted shoes. He took his place in a great chair set

for him, and the music began again. His tenor D droned and squeaked; he sang it with gusto, and could have gone on to his own immeasurable satisfaction for ever. So skilfully had the musician done his work that the Motet was a great success, the royal D blending with the notes of the boys' voices, or at awkward moments being effectually concealed or softened by them. The situation was saved—and mainly by this eleventh-hour discovery of France Caillette.

Glareanus was in raptures. He gave France an enormous piece of some kind of almond toffee which was a specialty, he said, of Siena in Italy, and was called *panforte*, or strong bread, and told him that early the next day he must be in his place again. At this second practice France was made to sing by himself. It was a little hymn, very sweet, to God's Mother, and Glareanus had written it, when he was young, for King Louis XI at the time he made the Virgin Mary Countess of Boulogne and Colonel of his Scottish Guard; the Guard still had silver medals with her effigy. France sang that after the Motet, and the King asked him a few kindly questions at the end about his welfare (though he said nothing of Papa) and at the end turned to Glareanus saying: "He has a beautiful voice; let him join the boys henceforth and you can make something of it. At present he sings too loud; his voice nearly drowned my D several times. . . . And he shall sing his hymn; I should like the Queen to hear that also."

So in the Collegial Chapel later in the day the Queen and her ladies listened to the great Motet, and the King's droned D; and she listened also to France's voice rising like a bird's—and like a bird—to the fretted and groined roof. She turned to the King and whispered, and gave France a friendly look. In his blue coat which belonged to one of the absent boys he went, by the music-master's direction, to the room in the *Logis du Roy* where they had had their practice; as he was passing by the Tower of Agnès Sorel one of the Queen's Bretons who was waiting with his comrades near the entrance for her came running, and gave him, by her order, a screwed-up cornet of sweets from the *drageoir*. His fortune seemed certainly made.

CHAPTER VIII THE PRINCE WITH HIS NAME UPSIDE DOWN

"Calla, calla, Julio Cæsar, Annibal y Scipion,
Viva la fama de Bourbon!"

THE SONG OF BOURBON'S FREEBOOTERS.

§1

THE blue coat of the King's boy-singers brought privileges and enlargements. For a time France spent his nights in the *Salle des Fous*, and reconciled himself to that as best he could; he was afraid, too, that in any other quarters he and Lisette might be parted. He had heard somewhere a pagan story of one —a God? a man? perchance a woman?—who was condemned to spend half the year in hell, but the other half was spent in Paradise or what stood for it among heretics and unbelievers. Infidels and heretics and unbelievers were, of course, those who were unfaithful to what you believed, or did not believe what you believed, and when they had purgatories and heavens and hells at all did not have proper ones, like yours. Papa when very drunk one night had told him this, and on a day (but this was later) he heard King Louis say much the same to his Queen, when he was chaffing her about her many pilgrimages and prayers. Queen Anne thought of religion all day long, and went to many famous shrines, especially in her own country; to go to a Pardon in Brittany was a great joy to her always. It grieved her that the King really cared only for just as much religion as would get him saved, or make him successful in his wars. Certainly he tried to please the austerer saints once by forbidding his soldiers in Italy to play flux and sequence and other card games, though he sometimes played himself, and it caused great discontent; but this was only because he wanted these saints on his side in his battles.

Well, France was like that pagan whose life was spent half in heaven and half somewhere else. He loved music; it was because they sounded like music that he had strung together those beautiful names in Touraine

and Anjou and the Blésois—Bracieux, Valençay, Cellettes, les Noels, Tour-en-Sologne, Vallières, Montrésor, St. Martin-le-Beau, Villeromain, Montbazon—and St. Cyr-en-Val, Chenonceaux, Cinq-Mars, Vienne, Villandry, Champigny-sur-Veude, Ponts-de-Cé — Solesmes, Fontevrault—oh, there were hundreds of them, some sweet and gracious, some sonorous and majestic and splendid like the trumpet-notes of heralds. The names sang themselves. But when France, on the roads, was caught once by his father making an artless little jingle which brought them in, Papa mimicked him, and, taking the ugliest names he could remember, turned these into lewd rhymes, which pleased him so much that he often sang them to his audiences. . . . Now the boy had music to his heart's content. It carried him from a sordid world into one where all seemed refined as in some vast crucible, so that pain became beautiful, sorrow beautiful, death beautiful, and what was beautiful already a thousand times more so. Here was another language of which words knew nothing. Only—it went to the very edge of all secrets, and, just at the very edge, when one waited expectant, became suddenly impotent. There was a last secret it seemed always trying to tell, which would solve all riddles, and make everyone happy; but it could not, and could only promise a meaning some day when barriers had gone and the soul itself was free.

His voice stood France in good stead. Josquin, the great musician, heard him and was enraptured, though he and Glareanus were rivals and of a different school, and Josquin would have grudged praise if his love for music had not been great enough to sweep prejudice and pettiness away. Queen Anne had him to sing more than once in her Oratory, and afterwards took him to her apartments, close to the Oratory, and plied him with sweetmeats, and was very gentle and motherly, though so magnificent and great; perhaps remembering those two little sons whose dust lay in Tours, under effigies with tiny marble hands clasped, and little marble dolphins playing round them; the baby boys she had borne to King Charles, and had never ceased to mourn. She had now only Claude, a delicate girl, whose life

the King's doctor, the great Honorat Picquet, had saved as by a miracle (in her gratitude Queen Anne had given him three hundred golden crowns for a fee), and the baby Princess, Renée. Against the Queen's will Claude was betrothed to the young son of her enemy, Louise of Savoy and Angoulême. Perhaps she thought sometimes with a sigh that her boys might now be alive and quick like this boy, so pleasant to look on, so innocent and yet so prematurely wise, so alert, yet dreamy, so responsive to the lovely things of life, yet only a little vagabond, and a score to one the son of the drunken Fool now in the Salle of Fools with buffoons, monsters, base-born servants, apes, parrots. . . . She kept the ouche, and would one day, when Bourbon came, show it to him, in case it had not been come by honestly, and was his. No doubt one of nature's innumerable odd freaks had given the lad that strange refinement, that passion for beauty, above all that curious likeness to a great and notable race which, if Francis of Angoulême died prematurely, would in the order of things inherit the throne of Saint Louis. Nature's freaks do now and then make very common clay strangely like the most delicate and costly ware.

But France was only once noticed again by the King. It was on an afternoon in early autumn, and his Majesty, who was fond of his wine, had been drinking freely. France was playing near the Tower of Agnès Sorel when he ran into the King suddenly, and was rated soundly for not paying more heed. There was no word said of Papa Caillette.

And Papa Caillette did not like to be forgotten too easily. "A hundred and twenty bastard-scarlet devils!" he said to France when he was told of the encounter, "'tis a sad thing when a King becomes a toss-pot, and cannot carry himself steadily, but must make a show of himself, and then blame others. And he forgets me. . . . He said nothing at all of me? Mark, my son," he went on very solemnly, wagging a blunt forefinger, "how even a great King's wits go when he drinks too much—and that even between meals! 'Tis almost as dangerous as working between meals, which a wise man will always avoid. As for your poor father, France, he

was born with a great thirst, and drinks to satisfy that, not of liking; no, no; I drink, but only when my health demands it. I suffer very much in my health, and a drop of drink makes me a new man."

"But Papa——"

"My son?"

"The new man is always thirsty too?"

Papa Caillette laughed. He clapped France on the shoulder. "Ah, but the difference between his Majesty and me is that I place a limit on my desires; the King—no. 'That sot' is what another great King once called him. Now I fix my limit; I will take, say, thirty cups, fifty; a limit has this advantage, one can lengthen it at need. The King—phut! He becomes the greatest drunkard in France. . . . But there, I forget myself." He paused a moment, and then: "And, by St. Brice, he has also forgotten me! For a time perhaps 'twas as well; but I am like a bear that sleeps and keeps quiet in the dark and frigid winter, and when the sun is due to shine pokes out his snout. I perceive that I must growl a little. I must even roar. I must dance, we will say, at the mouth of my cave, for, by the stomachs of all the fishes in seas and ponds and rivers, I have lived long enough on my own fat, and weary of it. Am I to stay for ever unregarded in this den of monsters and apes? They nauseate me, a man born for high things. I am sick of their 'Hee! Hee! Hees!' and 'Ho! Ho! Hos!' when I waste my best stories and songs on them. It is terrible what an artist like your poor father has to suffer, France; and how well I have done for you, my boy, while neglecting my own interests! Always remember that. It is not every lad, I tell you, whose father does so well for him that a great King can swear at him and tell him to get out of his way!"

His ear was healed, and he could tug again at both of them without pain; he did so, and thought long and intently, his narrow brow puckered. "You will have the luck, perhaps, to tread on the King's gouty toes next time, France, and be noticed; the great thing in this world is to be noticed. Would not a painter, the writer of a book, the maker of a song, rather have his

work roundly abused than be passed over in silence? And so one must force oneself upon the great; 'tis the politicians that cause trouble, and are ever in some quarrel to make themselves notorious and difficult, who come to the King's favour. When you were a very little boy, France, you distracted me once with your crying; I could think of nothing, and the more I thrashed you the more you cried. What did I do? I bought you a trumpet and a drum to keep you quiet. There is a moral in that, my son. . . . Life here becomes unbearable to a man of my gifts. If his Majesty wants my head because—forsooth—he has chosen to steal away my ouche and blame me, he may have it, rather than leave me a face on my shoulders, and never know the face!"

He rattled on, picturing to France the dismal scenes of his possible execution; the King, perhaps, witnessing it, admiring his fortitude, being smitten by the last dying look which Papa would turn on him—a Christian look, not vindictive, not malicious, but reproachful, pardoning—assumed at the moment when his head was struck off (if it were struck off) so that the sorrowful, forgiving smile should remain on the decapitated head even in the grave. It was so touching a picture that Caillette could not restrain his tears. He made an effort to show France the smile he would assume eternally—like this! He blubbered over one grievance and another. The little, vicious dog he played with could not understand a joke, and had caught his nose in its teeth when Papa was in the straw innocently barking and growling at it the other night. It had hurt him very much—his nose was still tender; France might see and feel where he had been nipped. The manners of his companions were disgusting. There was one fellow who called himself Triboulet, but it was not his real name; his real name was Le Fevrial, though some, to be sure, said it was François Hotman. He thought himself somebody, though he was really nobody at all; he came from some slum in Foix-les-Blois, and King Louis had picked him up as a boy when he was playing the bagpipes for his dinner in the streets below Blois Palace. He was a little crooked fellow, very ugly, with a hump back and a flat stomach, a nose three times the size of the next

largest nose in France (but of course there was the young Duke of Amboise, and royal noses had a right to be big and long). His arms hung below his knees like those of an ape. His eyes stuck out horribly. He had just come from Amboise, and belonged to the Countess of Angoulême to whom the King had given him for a Fool to amuse her Court. Perhaps it was the Queen's doing; she had no love for the Countess; but what a gift! This rascal was as insufferable as he was hideous. Jealous of Papa, as well he might be, he would play his bagpipes or the rebec or an old trumpet which squealed like fifty babies with pins in them, when Papa was telling his best tale, or singing his best song. By St. Nitouche and St. Pansard, Patrons of Folly, here was indeed a Fool of twenty-four carats, without a grain of wit or wisdom in him, but only malice and spite and conceit. His jests were as old as the world, "and," said Papa Caillette, "your father ought to know, my boy, since he has used them himself a thousand times. . . . A paltry fellow!" Triboulet was years younger than Caillette, and in a rough-and-tumble had battered the older man with his wooden sword into fears for his very life. And another time he had set some geese in the court on him; oh, an unpleasant rascal indeed for the grandson of the famous Fool of the famous Lord of Villehardouin to keep company with. (A Fool, like game, was none the worse for a little hanging.) But Papa meant to be equal to him yet.

§2

Among the other boy-singers France became well-enough liked, and he found Glareanus, though irascible, a good friend to him. Sometimes their master took them into the Loches Forest; in the green glades they were allowed to play hoodman blind, or games of catch, or perhaps "*crosse*," which was a kind of hockey, with an egg-shaped ball of boxwood. The pages had games far more elaborate, but the singing-boys and they never, of course, played together. One game which the pages played was called "*À l'Escaigne*," one had to strike a great ball full of air with a steel racket fastened to the arm. And then, for these boys of noble birth, was

training in all feats of arms and especially in horsemanship. The choir-singers could only watch from afar, without participating, and would have been sharply ordered off, or roughly handled, if they had tried to join in. King Louis XI had taken much of the power of the nobles into his own hands, and King Louis XII always loved best the common people—he held them in no contempt, and once reproved a haughty lord in a way never forgotten by the poorer sort of his realm. Knowing how this lord had treated the poor, the King asked him to his table, and gave him the richest food and finest wines; and afterwards asked him if he were satisfied. "'Twas a royal banquet indeed, Sire, but there was one thing lacking to make it perfect," he answered. "And that?" asked the King. "Bread, Sire. There was no bread on the board, nor, when I asked for it, was it brought." "*Le Diable m'emporte, monseigneur!*" said the King sternly, "you ask for bread, which is a necessity of life when luxuries can be forgone, yet the peasant who by his labour and with his hand gives you that bread you hold in scorn." For all that the pride of the nobles was not broken, and many of the pages looked down on boys of meaner birth as if they belonged to another race altogether, and had not come, after all, from a simple gardener and his wife in the beginning just like the greatest Seigneur in the world, and been saved by a Boy in a village carpenter's shop.

Even in this little world of Loches, King Louis, brotherly as he was, and willing equal justice for great and small, rich and poor, could not away with the differences between one and another. The castle people looked down on the town people just as the castle itself looked down on the town; the soldiers regarded with contempt the civilians, whom they called disdainfully "*peguins*"; the Guilds held apart and quarrelled among themselves; but strangest of all was it that the Churchmen, though men often spoke of them with contempt behind their backs, sometimes bore themselves more proudly than any others, and were very overbearing; they were divided, too, over the decision of the Council of Tours. But the Queen's Confessor was not like the others. He had noticed France now and then,

and remembered him as the boy who was there when the Queen asked about Louis de Bourbon, who was brother to that gentleman with his name upside down —Charles Monsieur—and had died in Italy a dozen years or so ago. This Yves de Maheuc was very natural and kindly, and not in the least proud; one day he had been speaking to a Bishop just before he came upon France; his face was flushed, and he said something afterwards to the boy about war being a bad and unbrotherly thing, very cruel and wicked, and that there were great men who should know better than to think it a wise or good thing, and urge Christian folk to kill one another. He said that men who wrote books were to blame also, for they had made a glory of ruin and bloodshed and terrors, yet did not go into jeopardy themselves as soldiers had to do. Blessed St. Francis had spoken with contempt, he said, of those who wrote in lays and chronicles of the Paladins and feats of arms, and deeds of great heroes, yet themselves were careful only to fight with pen and paint. He warned France against too much reading of romances, and stories of amour and war.

Yet the young Scottish Archer, Alec Maclean, who had become France's best friend in Loches, laughed at all this when France told him. "Men always have fought and always will," he said, "and there will always be those to sing their exploits. In my country the minstrels are held in high honour, and I listened to many of them in my father's hall, when they sang of our ancient chiefs and heroes, and their quarrels, and escapes, and loves. Many were aged men, unable to fight, but able to inspire others; some had great gifts of prophecy, and could foretell victory or defeat, and say what the luck of a man might be. They could read omens, and sometimes do things beyond human skill by charms and devices." Alec was very proud of the King of Scots, who was not only a bonny fighter, but loved ballads and songs about great deeds, rewarding handsomely those who made them. The Macleans had fought against him once. It was when Donald Dhu, whose grandfather was the last Lord of the Isles, had been set free from Inchconnal Castle, where he had been shut forty years; the Macleans of Glencoe carried him

away to Torquil Macleod's castle in the Lewis, and all the Highlands were in flames. But now there was peace between the King of Scots and the Macleans—*Eich ay!*—and he would say James was a very good King. Would the Queen's Confessor have men brought up like women, and become soft and feeble? Alec had small use for women, except, of course, his own mother, who wrote to him now and then, with the help of her good priest, being no clerk herself. It was because they were brought up hard the Scots made their way everywhere. They would find a Scot, he was quite sure, and that a Highlander, in these new countries they were discovering, ruling the inhabitants of those uninhabited lands. Porridge, red colewort, broth with a little sodden meat in it—perhaps less than that—had sent out overseas a race the like of which was not in the world though he said it. He spoke of factories and colleges in France, in Italy, in Zealand, Muscovy, in the Germanies, in many places out of Scotland where Scots were masters. Wherever they went they rose to the top. Ah, no country like broad Scotland and (for of course a Low Country carle was not the equal of a Highland gentleman) no country like Alec Maclean's own. And could they have held it, and still hold it, without fighting?

France asked quite innocently why, if Scotland were the finest land in the world, the Scots so often left it.

"We do not leave it," said his friend, proudly, "we carry it everywhere in our hearts, which is the safest place. And I ask you, France, how comes it if I am not speaking truth that even in your country the Scots come first after your King? Indeed, I think a Scottish gentleman is greater than the King of France, between you and me, since he guards that King's life. Now 'tis not seventy years since the hundred Scottish Lancers were attached to his personal guard, and before long they were at the head of all the fifteen companies of the Men-at-Arms. The Scottish Lancers and Archers of the Bodyguard have saved the Kings and France so many times, that they come first in all the Kingdom." The Archers, he said, took precedence of the four hundred other Scottish Guards, and Alec Maclean had himself, though very young, been made an Archer be-

cause of the good service of his family—none the less, every Scot in the King's service was a gentleman of consequence, and must by no means be reckoned a common soldier. The Captain of the Archers was always called the First Captain of the King's Guard, and at the Coronation he stood next to the sovereign, and was afterwards given the royal robe. When any enemy town surrendered, the Governor delivered up the keys to the Captain of the Scottish Archers. At the death of the King the coffin was carried by the Archers. This famous Guard was commanded by the Captain, by two lieutenants known as "*Hommes d'Armes,*" and by twenty-four Archers of the Body who slept near the King's chamber; besides this there were seventy-eight Archers of the Guard, all gentlemen by birth, each of whom had his squire and his valet or "*coustilier.*"

Alec Maclean himself was not in the actual Body-guard attached most closely to the person of King Louis—this was reserved for Archers of riper years and long service, but he hoped in time to attain this rank, the proudest in the world. The Italian Wars might make promotion rapid if one were lucky. He took France often into the Guardroom, and sometimes the boy and he would sit for an hour on the ramparts, or perhaps on the edge of the vast wooden bed which Alec shared at night with another young guardsman—a bed huge enough to hold giants—and talk over feats of arms, and men who had risen, and great Captains, and old and present battles. France ran errands for him, and polished his arms, and was proud to do this.

§3

It was really Lisette who held France Caillette to the *Salle des Fous*. He reproached himself sometimes with the thought that he would have quitted the company of his father, always drunk or half-drunk, always or nearly always quarrelsome, always boastful, and disgusting in his habits and sense of humour, far more readily than that of a little, grey, wizened-face monkey bought from a drunken sailor for a song. In his miseries on the road he had found solace often and often in the companionship of his pet. He would whisper his

troubles into the tiny ears, so nearly human; his tears after a thrashing matted Lisette's fur at nights when (a flea or two is not so very terrible) they cuddled together. Lisette seemed to understand. More than once she had flown at Charles Caillette when he beat the boy with stick, or strap, or whip, or kicked him. France might have slept with the other boy-singers, with three or four of whom he had made friends, but then he and Lisette must have been parted, and the monkey have stayed with the apes, parrots, dogs and monsters. No; he could not bring himself to desert Lisette. Once in that late summer the Court moved for a time to Blois, and the singing-boys went to sing. It was a magnificent Palace, this, and during the present reign there had been much building, which was not yet finished. The Sire de Champhoet, a Breton, governed it; and the Queen was fond of Blois, which was indeed a pleasant place, with its market shaded by pollard limes, the broad river with its islands and wooden quay from which the Queen's splendid barge would be rowed by her water-men up and down the stream, the old wooden bridge shaped like the back of an ass bowed under heavy burdens, the ancient houses, the washerwomen bare-footed in the shallow water, the steeples and pinnacles, belfries, gargoyles, and painted windows of the churches. And the Château itself—a stupendous mass, but somehow less terrible and less massive than Loches, though this too made one dizzy to look down from some of the heights. It stood at the end of the Rue Porte-Côte, above the river, yet was almost hidden from the banks, and around it were lovely gardens and woods. The newer buildings were of red brick crossed with purple and roofed with purple slate; everywhere one saw the devices of Louis and Anne. There was a great hall called the *Salle des États*, hung with tapestries about Troy. Near the chapel was a loggia which was known as the Bretons' Perch, because here the Queen's Breton Guards waited for her when she came from Mass, and escorted her back to her apartments, or perhaps to the Pavilion she had had built among trees some little way from the Château to remind her of her own land. This was fashioned in the style of a little Breton farm-

house, and was capped with purple slate so shaped that the roof might almost have been the cap of some Bretonne giantess of old years. Once or twice the boys were sent to the Pavilion to sing, and the Queen gave them sweetmeats, and good counsel. When she came from Mass she always said the same thing as she limped across the court: "Ah, there are my good Bretons waiting for their Duchess!" Her Breton Guards were all picked men, fine and stalwart fellows, and wore black velvet doublets studded with great gilt buttons. Queen Anne was always home-sick for her Brittany, and was far prouder of being its Duchess than of being Queen of France.

In the Palace there was a fine Library; France was allowed to go in with Master Glareanus, who knew the Keeper of the King's books. The boy was walking round on tip-toe when the Librarian came up, a white-haired man with a keen, kindly, wrinkled face, who noticed his interest and showed him some treasures; Dante's Poems; The Three Pilgrimages, of Human Life, of Jesus Christ, and of the Soul; a volume with strange old maps in it with whales and dolphins and ships in the seas and savages and pine-trees and dragons and lions and beings with heads in their breasts, on the countries of the earth; and many other books. There was a New Testament, very ancient, bound sumptuously in black velvet; and the Problesmes d'Aristotle; and some great books with chains fastened to them as if they were dangerous, and many with beautiful pictures in colours and gold. The Librarian asked Glareanus about the boy, and soon all France's shyness went, and he put questions himself, at some of which the two men smiled. Since he had been with the choir he had learned to read longer and more difficult words, but he did not know a great deal, and felt how very ignorant he was. "You must learn, boy," said the Librarian, "for your eyes tell me you have the scholar in you; books are the keys to all knowledge that is of value, but, mark you, they are not keys that turn without pain."

In Blois also he talked to the workmen; sometimes to plain fellows with but three sous a day for their pay, but sometimes with master-craftsmen and master-

masons, who liked France's bright, eager face, and told him many curious things about their crafts. Even in a few brief weeks at Blois he learnt a great deal. But he missed little Lisette, and, though the *Salle des Fous* was very foul and noisy after Blois, his heart gave a jump of delight when the monkey, making her odd little whimpering cry, leapt into his arms again. And he was very glad to see Alec Maclean. But how different his father was from the kind old Librarian in the quiet Library at Blois turning over the leaves of his books as if he loved every page and every letter; or from those craftsmen fashioning beautiful things in stone and wood and glass and metal! He took less pleasure in France's return than even the dogs who came running up, wagging their tails joyously to see him; and far less than did Lisette. "By a dozen purple devils," his father grumbled, when the little dog that had caught his nose in its teeth leapt up gladly to lick France's face, "the cur who bit your poor father's nose nearly off! And me so good to dogs and dumb creatures! 'Tis the way of this miserable world, boy; do not heed this fawning of dogs or men, which means but that they want a crust or bone. (Perhaps that cur took your poor father for a bone—I can make a jest from that.) When I bought Diamond, the big black dog which drew our cart a year back—you remember—he turned lazy from my over-kindness, and I had to draw both cart and him in the end—but did I turn him adrift? And had he gratitude? Nor would he guard our things when we were on a lonely road or in the woods at night; but would sleep, and never bark, though he was strong enough awake to put any thieves to flight; what did I do? Turn him adrift? Nenny, no; but bought a little noisy dog to wake him up by its barking if thieves came. That is the man your father is, France; yet no gratitude falls in my basket."

Papa ignored the fact, or had forgotten it, that poor Diamond had been thrashed pitilessly and starved into skin and bone, and had been kicked to death at last when his master was lion-drunk, one night. He was jealous of the notice taken of the boy, even by animals —even by women, though as Papa remarked these were

not exactly dumb creatures. He was full of his own affairs and troubles. This rascal Triboulet was become intolerable; he stole all Papa's jests and stories, and passed them off as his own. But one day Papa would be even with him, by the enormous stomachs of little fishes!

§4

There were wars and rumours of war in the spring that followed. To France Caillette himself all this did not mean very much. Sometimes the King would go to Blois, to Paris; the Queen visited many shrines, and once went by barge into Brittany, staying at Nantes, her strong and ancient capital where the great feudal castle of the Dukes was; it was set in a rich countryside of vineyards and orchards. . . . Once she visited a new castle she had built not long before at Gien. Loches would be quiet as the grave one day, and another day full of life, with the sovereigns, one or both, arriving with a great clatter and in clouds of dust; the Queen always in her enormous curtained and plumed litter, with six mules drawing it, and other mules, or horses, harnessed behind, and men with the mules, and pages riding postillion, and cavaliers and ladies, lackeys and maids; but the King usually on his splendid Spanish horse. Then all day and every day there seemed to be grave business transacted, in which Fools and little singing-lads were of small consequence; King Louis being concerned with other and weightier matters than the cracking of jokes or the singing of "D" in a Motet. Glareanus tore his long frizzled hair and waved his arms despairingly at the folly of these great folk. Was not France wide enough? Were the French not happy enough, prosperous enough, and had not the good God given them a fair and smiling and rich land of their own? Yet phantasies of descent and parchments must set all awry. Men working cheerily in their fields must cast aside the spade and plough, leave their homes, brave the horrid ice and snows of the mountains, carry terror and desolation with them across the Alps, and gain nothing but a foreign grave, or life-long disease and misery and mutilation. What fools were we mortals! Very soon roads would be thronged with new

levies rushing to kill or be killed by men with whom they had no private quarrel, whom they had never seen, had never even heard of, except as nationals of another land. And beautiful things that had been made lovingly by God and man would be destroyed; instead of glorious and sweet music would be the whistle of arrows, the hoarse roar of cannon, the shrieks of wounded and dying. His pity covered all, for he was half-Italian, half-French. France and Italy, he said once, were sisters, living too close together, and a quarrel between them was more bitter in the end than any other. It was terrible to think of all those lads and fine men, gentlemen and peasants alike, from every quarter of France —the impetuous, noisy, volatile Parisians, the shrewd, calculating Normans, the Bretons superstitious yet devout, gloomy yet noisy in their cups, the little, brown, bragging Gascons, the proud natives of the Dauphiny; the sons of cottage and farmstead, the sons of château and castle—these easy, pleasure-loving folks of the Touraine countryside whom they saw about them every day—all hale and well and happy now, yet soon to be mangled bodies in that sunny and lovely land, Italy, which men began to call the Frenchman's grave. . . . And then the poor horses, that had no quarrel with man. . . . But Alec Maclean laughed at all this when France Caillette told him. War was glorious; God Himself was a Man of War, and the Bible full of famous fighters—why, there was even war in heaven. He hoped above all things that he might go out. One could die but once, and better in a gallant fight than in a stuffy bed with leeches and monks round one. Not that he wished to die so young; but he had his duty, to be a soldier, and fight loyally for the cause of the King whose bread he took, and—who knew?—he might in time win fame for his regiment and for himself, and for Scotland. It was Alec who pointed out to the boy the famous men, or men beginning to be talked of, who came at this time to join in consultations with the King. There were notabilities of the long robe, from Paris and from Tours; prelates; financiers, Jews among them wealthy enough, said Alec, to buy towns and principalities with their gold; contractors; statesmen; soldiers.

And one day a very fine gentleman and great noble rode in to Loches. He was splendidly attended, so that at first France thought he must be some Emperor or King. His men had plumed morions on their heads, and some were in red, some in blue, their dress being fashioned over the hose into a kind of skirt; on their breasts were crosses. There were hundreds of these in attendance, and a host of equerries, secretaries, clerks, and servants of different ranks; the pages, France noticed, were all lads well in their teens, no quite little boys were among them, as among the King's and Queen's pages. King Louis came out into the court to meet him and do him honour, and with the King many great personages, who were most deferential to the newcomer, but he was too proud to doff cap to any but King Louis, who told him courteously to stay covered. He was dressed with magnificent and costly simplicity in black velvet and silver brocade, so that he stood out conspicuously among the glitter and garishness of his retinue. A great diamond flashed in his poniard-scabbard. All eyes were on him and none other, as he dismounted lightly from his horse, which, more richly decked than its master, trod as if proudly conscious of the jewels and gold studding the harness and caparisons, and its sham horn, of gold, like a unicorn's. A proud couple this; this horse worth a Duke's ransom, and its very noble rider. This King, if he were a King —for surely no one less would come in such state—was in his early twenties, dark, with a long, melancholy face, and most haughty mien, bearing himself with the consciousness of the highest rank.

"It is Charles Monsieur," said Maclean, at the very moment when, among all the banners, some with the arms of France quartered with arms strange to France Caillette, some with a band of gules on azure, some with the motto "*Espérance,*" the boy noticed a pennant on which was a running stag, and under it, "*Penetrabit.*"

So this gentleman, then, little older than Alec Maclean his friend, was the great and mysterious Charles Monsieur, and at last France had seen him face to face. He had given the boy a passing glance out of dark, restless, melancholy eyes as he rode by in his superb

and even royal state towards the King's lodging, talking with the King as if they were equals. But for the great lords he had naught but now and then a curt word.

CHAPTER IX THE CHARTREUSE DU LIGET

"Dieu sait en quelle joye mon cœur
Sera de les loupz chasser." LOUIS DE BREZE.

§1

THE splendid guest had come but on a flying visit, and for a couple of days Loches, the austere stronghold which sad ghosts haunted, flung on gaiety as if an immense gay tapestry covered Donjon and Martelet, Logis and courts and spur-towers and ramparts, drawbridge and portcullis and moat, with pictured gallantries, huntings, flowers and feats-of-arms. On the walls of France's memory and imagination hung also, in contrast to and clothing the sordid and cruel, those few coloured days. One evening there was a great banquet in the hall of the *Logis du Roy;* men stood everywhere with flaming torches to light up armour, jewels, silks, velvets; music flooded the spring night. Another day a tournament was held in a clearing of the woods a mile or two from the Château; tents of all colours and devices, banners and banderoles and pennants, trumpets of heralds, fair ladies and the gallantry of brave men, made it memorable. France saw this. The most splendid knight of all was the dark, handsome young Duke whose sombre eyes had rested on the boy for a moment, and turned away. How great a lord he was! There were resounding titles shouted by the heralds, but none so magnificent as his. It seemed the list of them would never end. Duc de Bourbon, Duc d'Auvergne, Duc de Châtelleraut, Comte de Clermont-en-Beauvoisis, de Clermont-en-Auvergne; de Montpensier, Forez, La Marche, de Gien; Sovereign Prince of Dombes; Dauphin d'Auvergne; Vicomte de Carlat and Murat; Sire de Beaujeu, de Combraille, de Mercœur, d'Auvonai, de la Roche-en-Regnier, de Bourbon-Lançy—there were many others. From afar France saw him enter the lists, and wished—how he wished!—that

he too might one day be a knight, and do great feats of arms, and be chivalrous and worthy, and carry off prizes under bright eyes. Of course that could never be his lot—yet he longed for it. These great lords were, of course, of different clay, as if in Eden God had made two different Adams and Eves, the first but borel folk; the other pair the perfection of His handiwork, from whom should spring the finest instances earth could show of His skill. And yet the common people had fingers and toes, cried, suffered, loved, were jealous, might enjoy good things if they had them, just like their betters. It was all very puzzling.

But soon he forgot himself and all this in admiration and wonder. A strange, terrible, yet splendid figure, this young Duke riding like a hurricane towards his adversaries, plumed and glittering on the plumed and glittering steed, the huge *lambrequin* of coloured cloth trailing from his helmet-crest in the wind—— The housings of his destrier were covered with fleur-de-lys; a gilded lily was on his helmet; from the horse's head projected the great golden horn. Here were strength, dexterity, grace, beauty, valour; all feudality and all chivalry personified. The Scottish Archers of the Guard were around the King, and helping with the French and Swiss Guards to hold the lists and keep back the crowds from all the countryside whom the King's good-temper had permitted to enjoy a sport they were too mean to share. The French Guards had bows and arrows, hatchets, some of them espadons or great two-handled swords. The Archers of this Guard were gentlemen each with his hundred sols of pay a month; the mounted men rode fine horses. Then there was the Swiss Guard; huge fellows, some of these, who had twelve francs a month, and two new uniforms a-piece a year; they wore the King's colours and plumes, and carried among their armament curious javelins; it was part of their privilege and duty to assist at the royal levée, and to set out the tasselled cloth-of-gold cushions on which the King knelt to pray at bedtime. But Louis often dispensed with ceremony, for which he had little liking. The band of the Swiss Guard was playing when France came to the tournament ground.

But far more splendid than any of these were the Scots, famous throughout all Europe. They were all tall men, and some of immense bulk and stature; and in their white *soyon* and silver bullion, and costly gold-work, and with the glittering metal plates on their breasts bearing the royal crown, made a fine showing in the sun. Their banners were chiefly white; the officers rode grey chargers. France was close to one of their standards; the ground of it was white, embroidered with gold, and fringed deeply with gold; on one side were three trees and a running greyhound; on the other the crowned fleur-de-lys, and this bore the motto: "*In omni modo fidelis.*" Then there were the private banners of high officers; on one was a lion holding a naked sword, and a smaller one had a shield of lilies within a buckled circlet. Around the King were a score or so of Archers on foot, all armed with halberds, and in white cloth jerkins bordered with gold, in white hose, and in helmets with white plumes; their Captain's surcoat was studded with flashing jewels. Others according to their rank or standing wore blue surcoats and the St. Andrew's Cross—the Yeomen were in blue serge. Truly the old song was right which said that the Scottish Guard was not accoutred or clad like common folk:

"*Mais comme roys, princes, ou empereurs.*"

France stood near one of the *coustiliers* who was on foot, and who carried a curiously sinister looking three-edged sword. The boy only saw Alec Maclean in the distance, and had no chance of speaking to him. But the *coustilier* seemed to know everyone, and was loud in his praises of the Duke of Bourbon—Charles Monsieur. He said he was the greatest and richest lord in France, next to the King himself, and was as good as a King in his own lands. At Moulins he summoned his own Parliament, and he had his own Court like a great monarch, with Chamberlain, and Cup-Bearer, and nobles serving him. He had every right of justice over his subjects, just like a King. He had been only four years old when the quarrel over Naples began; at seventeen he went himself to Italy, where he did great feats

at Genoa and elsewhere, though so young. His father's cousin, Duke Pierre the Second, had been married to that very great lady, Anne of France, the daughter of the last King Louis, who was always called "Madame La Grande"—she had been Regent once. Mackinnon, this valet to one of the Archers, had been in Naples in the expedition of 1494, when King Louis, then Duke of Orleans, crossed the Alps, and the Duke's father, going later with King Charles, had been made Viceroy of the Kingdom of Naples. Mackinnon said he had seen Madame La Grande—she was dressed, he remarked, in a green satin robe, covered with diamonds, pearls, and rubies; she had precious stones and pearls everywhere, necklaces, rings, aigrette, chains; faith, Madame was better worth sacking than many a rich city! And when the Duke's father and elder brother were dead, Madame had brought her little cousin to La Chaussière, where she and the Duke were kind to him; he was a brilliant boy of twelve then, knowing his Latin well, good at sports, very dexterous in the saddle. He had gone as hostage to Valenciennes with the Duke of Alençon, and the Counts of Vendôme and Foix; but afterwards to Moulins, the Duke of Bourbon's capital city. Then Duke Pierre took a fever at Cluny, and died after two months' illness; there were seventeen hundred followers in his funeral procession to the Benedictine Abbey of Souligny where he was buried. After that Madame was like a mother to the boy; his own mother, an Italian and one of the Gonzaga family, lived in Mantua; a clever woman—but then of course an Italian, who were the most pestilent people in God's world. So there at Moulins, which Mackinnon had heard was a pleasant enough place and the Palace very magnificent, with the most wonderful gardens and menageries in all France (but he himself had never seen them), Charles Monsieur studied his Latin for hours a day, under his tutor, the Sieur de Condé; rode and raced his ponies; learnt the use of lance and sword, dagger and bow and arrow; hunted and hawked; played fine games at bombarding and defending mimic castles with his friend, young Monseigneur François d'Angoulême, and other boys of rank. A glorious training (except of course the

Latin, which was good enough no doubt for lawyers, leeches and priests) for the profession of arms. He was at Tours for the betrothal of his friend Count François and the Princess Claude, with a great escort of horse and of archers on foot; at the feats of arms he had carried off all the chief prizes. Then he went to Lyons and Italy, commanding the *pensionnaires* of King Louis; and Mackinnon waxed eloquent about this splendid company, great lords all, each with fifteen or twenty men to serve them; there were a thousand altogether under Charles Monsieur's command, and he still little more than a boy. Charles Monsieur had married the Regent's daughter, Suzanne of Beaujeu, and they were very happy together; she was not pretty, and was rather lame, but was gentle and sweet, and he was a good husband to her, casting eyes on no other woman. It was not often a fine soldier cared for one plain woman and was true to her, when there were so many fine chances in the wars.

After the tournament the King had largesse given out of a great silver-gilt bowl to the crowds, and the great lords also amused themselves by throwing largesse, the Duke of Bourbon's officers at his order flinging great sums away to be scrambled and fought for. Some said it was the Queen's money the King distributed at her wish; he was not very lavish, and she helped him in this way because she wanted him to be thought more generous than he was. Her own revenues were immense, and she was free with them, and benevolent to all. Certainly it was the Queen who had the Breton wrestlers to amuse the common people after the great folk had done. Some of these were big Bretons from her personal Guard. The Bretons were fine wrestlers, much better than the French, and wrestled after the rules of their own land.

§2

Six miles from Loches, in the forest, was an ancient monastery of the Carthusians; the Chartreuse du Liget. It was founded centuries ago by King Henry the Second of England in atonement for his murder of St. Thomas à Becket, and pilgrims often visited it. This

was one of the merry excursions on which Glareanus now and then took his singing-boys when he was pleased with them. A day or two after the tournament the boys went to the Chartreuse du Liget, carrying with them balls and sticks for their games, and little paniers of bread, boiled meat, Brehemont cheese, and fruit, and pitchers of Anjou wine. Their way lay by the scene of the tournament and games; all that was left of the splendid pageant now was a clearing of trampled earth and grass, with hoof marks, and the wheel marks of the great carts (each drawn by six horses) in which the tents and provisions and other requirements for the brilliant and busy day had been brought. Not a soul there—all passed and gone as if it had never been; the colours, the music, the fair faces, the bravery. Around were only the solemn trees watching, as they had watched for long centuries, in silence, the fading of the generations of men like forest leaves when summer is over.

They went to the monastery, where a tiny colony of white monks, their heads closely shaven, welcomed them, and showed them cloisters and a little garden of herbs and flowers, and the garth with its mounds. Shy, humble men, nearly all, living their frugal and innocent lives quietly there till death took them; remote from human habitations, within their grey ancient walls. At Loches were those who had all and wanted all; at the Chartreuse du Liget those who had renounced all; and here it seemed to France were faces, most of them, better satisfied, more at rest, and happy.

But they were not, it seemed, quite remote from the world. Not very far from the monastery the boys heard the baying of hounds, the shouting of men, and, very clear and shrill in the forest glades, the sound of horn. Through the trees and shrubs they caught for a flashing moment the royal hunt passing in a blaze of colour, in which predominated the vivid green of the King's Master of the Hunt and his twelve mounted huntsmen, and of a regiment of huntsmen and beaters on foot. Wagoners lashed at horses drawing cumbrous carts piled with nets, and with poles and striped and coloured cloth and silk for the tents where the repast was to be taken. Half a dozen valets were in charge of hunting

dogs of many breeds, greyhounds, bloodhounds, spaniels, boar-hounds. Falconers bore falcons and tercels, on cadges; and from some shoulders were slung the lures, and little pages bore long velvet embroidered pouches with provender for the hawks if it were needed. King Louis was not so famous a huntsman as the last Louis, who, mean in many things, would give unstintingly where this pleasure of Kings was concerned, and paid vast sums for horses, rare Greenland and Iceland peregrines, Breton spaniels, little Spanish greyhounds of long pedigree, and dogs from the kennels of Valence bred and trained for the chase. But Louis the Twelfth, for all that, hunted (unlike his predecessor) in and out of season, caring nothing for Holy Cross Day or other dates; he loved best the nets, and to have the brockets and stags and great stags driven into the toils after the wise old tufting dogs had found them and forced them from the thickets, when they could be shot down without mercy. For his guests he provided other sport after their liking. To-day the hunt was too far in the distance, and swept from sight or was hidden by the trees too rapidly, for any to see what game they were at.

Master Glareanus and the boys entered the thicker part of Loches Forest. The noise of the huntsmen died away. Only once did the angry bark of a hawk and the cry of some falconers who had wandered from the rest of the company and were trying different luck reach their ears; "*A l'aguet! A l'aguet!*"—some bird, a partridge perhaps, a heron, was in the quake of fear and quiver of agonized death. Music-master and boys played their games, sang in chorus with only birds to listen, and took their alfresco meal by the side of a little rippling woodland stream. After it some lay and lazed in the sun or the tree shade; some wandered afield, till a whistle should summon them for the long homeward tramp through the forest. There were two of the boys with whom France had struck up a friendship; they went off together, taking with them a ball and the sticks with which, before the picnic, they had joined in the game of Crosse. On a patch of sandy soil the boys knocked the ball hither and thither in idleness, often losing it in the scrub, and searching till they

found it. But, one boy hitting it with more force, they looked by and by in vain while the day wore on, and France, going heedlessly into the thickness of the woods, suddenly found himself alone and out of touch with the others. He shouted for them again and again, but had no answer. No doubt the penetrating shrillness of the whistle would reach his ears and give him his bearings, he thought, when Glareanus summoned his company to assemble for the return journey. There was a thicket near which he had not explored, and he made one more effort to find the ball before leaving the place. Plunging into the dense vegetation, the earth, to his alarm, gave way under him without warning; he felt himself falling, in a shower of sand, small stones, and foliage. To save himself he clutched at coarse grass, at gorse, at bushes; tearing his hands, and dragging reeds and undergrowth from the sand by the roots. He had heard that not far from the Chartreuse du Liget there was a disused sandstone quarry; it was soon evident that he had stumbled upon it, but here fortunately the descent was not precipitous; he slipped breathlessly into a prickly tangle of shrub almost covering a small plateau, like a cup, of sandy soil. Face, hands, legs, were scratched and bleeding; one leg hurt him badly; he lay there gasping for breath and dazed for what must have been several minutes, but, for all he knew, might have been many hours. The great Forest of Loches shut him in, and human habitations and human life seemed in another and unreachable world.

He must rest awhile; slowly his breath came back, the dazed feeling as if the world was swinging and staggering round him—a drunken world, in which he himself was drunk—passed, and he was able to think clearly. He felt himself all over; no, he was not badly hurt, but the strained leg would make return difficult and painful—perhaps even impossible. He shouted again and again but no reply came from his comrades. He was in the wildest part of the forest. Not many yards away, partially screened by bramble and gorse, was the edge of a precipice made by the quarriers of long-ago in hewing out the sandstone. The plateau or

cup on which he had found safety for a time covered a space perhaps as large as the great courtyard at Blois, though he had dropped to the narrow edge of it, where at most it was seven or eight feet in breadth. Behind rose the steep but not actually precipitous wall of sandstone and sandy soil down which he had slipped; a little farther along, he noticed, there was a zig-zag descent to the plateau, used perhaps by quarry-men long ago, very perilous, but not actually impossible for a hardy and cautious climber to descend or ascend. High overhead he could see the trees of the forest rising from broken but in the main level ground. Again and again the boy essayed the ascent. When the earth had given way beneath him, he must have retained his grip of the stout stick used in the game; he found it by him when his senses returned, and he tried desperately to gain and keep some foot-hold by its help, with the other hand clutching at reed, briar, juniper, heather, jutting fragments of stone; but again and again the pain and stiffness of his leg, the loose sandy soil, the overhanging elbows and shelves of sandstone, foiled him and made his attempts futile. He sat down on the plateau to think what to do. In this remote and hidden fastness, hard to discover—and only accident had discovered it to him—and very difficult to reach, night might fall, day break and fade, and succeeding nights and days, without help coming. Already he longed for water, and the knowledge that there was nothing to quench his thirst, and nothing to eat if hunger came desperately upon him, added the terrors of imagination to reasonable fears. Surely woodman, peasant, monk, must come this way through the forest, and a cry would bring rescue. But what if he became too faint and too exhausted to cry? What if, after days of exposure and thirst and starvation, he heard sounds of human life passing in the world above—voices, songs, the jingle of bells and crack of whips—and was too weak for his own voice to carry, so that the sounds passed and died away?

And there were other sounds not to be welcomed. Wolves were in the forest; boars; and, said legend, beasts not really beasts, yet more dreadful and more deadly; men not really men. . . . These creatures

beyond nature would make the night more terrible than could any with whose forms and natures he was familiar. He crossed himself again and again, and on his knees muttered Paternosters and Aves, and right within himself, speaking more closely to the good God than fingers or lips could talk, more intimately than when he appealed to Saint after Saint, France begged that help might be sent. He felt calmer then, and ashamed of his fears. But in a thicket on the plateau, when he explored this tiny island of brief security, the boy found something which set him a-quake again for a minute, and brought his heart to his mouth. It was a deep, narrow cavern running into the sandy wall, the opening almost screened by tangled and matted vegetation. He plucked up courage and groped his way in for a few yards, keeping his ears at the strain for any rustle or suspicion of sound; twice and thrice he stopped, holding his breath, because a twig cracked, a pebble moved, a clot of sand fell. As far as he was able to penetrate no living creature seemed within, but there were traces of habitation by forest beasts. He was hot and exhausted; and though afternoon grew late the sun was still fiercely holding the skies against the advancing legions of darkness. It struck heavily on the plateau as a King might strike to show his power when he knows that power waning, and soon to be challenged and broken. France mopped his brow and hair, and found shelter in the comparative coolness of the undergrowth, at a short distance from the mouth of the cavern, within which he did not wish to risk being trapped. His ears, though he lay seemingly listless and inert, were intent on every little sound, of insect or bird or leaf; his eyes watched from his hiding-place the rim of forest far above. Suddenly a sound different from the others (but he could see nothing new) reached him, and his senses were all tense and alert; he gripped the heavy stick. There was a rustle, a snapping and rending of twigs and boughs, the noise of some heavy, panting, grunting body forcing its way in concealment. It broke cover, and crossed an open space bare of any growth. The boy lay motionless and hidden, hardly daring to breathe, as a huge boar rushed towards the

cavern, and was lost in it. It had passed within a few yards of him without noticing his presence.

And then the reason of the brute's haste and clumsy flight disclosed itself. A hunting-horn sounded; in silhouette on the edge of forest and quarry figures passed singly, in groups, trees and tall bush hiding them now and then—and then again they moved clear and quick against a free background. A noble stag was first. For an instant it stood hesitant, in a panic of indecision and weakness, as the baying of many hounds of many breeds broke into an inharmonious chorus. Then trunks and foliage hid it, as it passed behind them, to emerge clearly a few moments later. . . . *The running stag!* A memory of the crest flashed inconsequently across France's mind. His eyes, watching from the thicket the height above, saw perhaps what none other saw; with an incredible agility and speed the poor doomed beast, "harboured," tracked by the tufters, and driven forth with the pack upon its scent, had for the time out-distanced them; now its splendid antlers were laid back, it evaded or leapt over obstacles, and ran like the wind when there was clearer ground. . . . In vain. The medley of hounds had the scent again; here were horsemen riding recklessly in pursuit, and men on foot, scrambling, leaping, seemed to spring in every gap where sky and heath formed a background in order to drive it back upon the pack. The great stag turned at bay, but its day was nearly done. Baffled everywhere, foiled this way and that, it plunged as a diver plunges into a deep sea over the edge of the precipice, perhaps blindly in its terror, perhaps with intention, choosing the kindlier death. Huntsmen on horse and foot clustered overhead. Suddenly a stout fellow detached himself, and came clambering down the zig-zag to the plateau, on the very edge of which the stag lay quivering, but not dead. The hounds all but two stood eager yet reluctant; but these two followed, slipping and sliding after the man who was making the dangerous descent in order to cut the throat of the victim and then disembowel it. Painfully the exhausted and wounded stag turned in a last gallant defence. A hound fell back yelping—and for a second France turned his

eyes. It was not far from the mouth of the cavern, and just within the mouth France saw the gleam of wicked little eyes looking out from semi-darkness—the glint of savage tusks.

The boy was unobserved himself; instantly he saw that the man, some little distance from the cave, and with his back towards it, was in imminent and unsuspected danger. France jumped from his hiding-place, shouted and ran forward. It was almost instinctive. As he shouted, the boar with an unbelievable speed charged, scarcely pausing as it tossed the hound aside, mangled and shrieking piteously, and dying.

§3

It puzzled France that night, when he lay awake, as he sometimes did at night's beginning, thinking over the doings of his little, gone day, and whether he had done ill or well with it (for he had learnt that one must do one's best to please the good God) which of these four was most his brother; the stag, the huntsman, the hound, or the boar which had slain the hound, and but for him would have slain the huntsman. St. Francis, whom he loved best among Saints, and who he thought must be most like Jesus Christ, held all creatures to be of one brotherhood; creatures strong or weak, gentle or cruel, good or even what men called bad. He had even a wolf for his friend.

At the moment of the boar's heavy onset, the huntsman, warned by France's cry, turned his head, and, twisting aside in a flash, spun round to face his adversary. He was only just in time to save himself. If the terrible tusk had missed him, and he had escaped the disembowelling which a minute later he would himself have inflicted on the dying stag, the rush of the infuriated beast must in all likelihood have swept him from the narrow edge of the plateau into the gulf below. His knife was already unsheathed and in his hand. He struck out swiftly, with an amazing dexterity and force; the boar, with blood streaming from its matted grey flank, staggered and with an immense effort checked itself and turned. But the second and uninjured hound, small but plucky, was already at its other flank, worry-

ing it, and, deftly avoiding the tusks, was striving to grip the vast, bristled throat. France, scarcely knowing what he did in his excitement, ran forward with his heavy stick uplifted. He struck and thrust, at the short legs, the massive neck, the snout, the ponderous, matted body, the tiny, wicked eyes—wherever came his opportunity—and then the huntsman found his chance. The man's knife, red and dripping already, drove home.

It had all happened more swiftly than words tell. On the edge of the forest high above them, men were clustered; horses; hounds leashed and unleashed. One horseman stood sharply outlined; his white glove, gilded and jewelled, holding the rein, showed in a notable contrast against the deep black of his finely sculptured horse. Cautiously, without the reckless boldness of the fellow who had followed the stag, and whose knife was still deep in the throat of the dead boar, several huntsmen began to descend the zig-zag to the plateau.

"*Boyaux du Pape!*" said the man whose life France had saved, "that was a near matter, comrade, and I did not know the hunter was the hunted. To think of this great, grisly rascal with his little pig eyes on me—and yours too, for that matter," he went on, making France, at high tension still, and realizing his own danger now it was past, laugh nervously at the unintentioned comparison of his eyes and the boar's. "By the spine of St. Basil, you are a bold lad and brave companion—and I like one that laughs when death is barely round the corner, as if Master Death were nothing at all. 'Tis no way of dying a soldier would choose out of love for it, to have his inside ripped out, and wear his bowels on him like a coat. I am soldier first, huntsman after—though I can 'encore' a great stag as well as another—and in battle it is one's job to face death from those worthy of steel—but to be killed by a pig in a hole! You have done a good day's work for yourself, lad, as for me; my master will not let one who has saved his best archer be the worse for it. Baudemanche is my name—Achille Baudemanche—and no doubt you have heard it often?" He waited for a reply, but the name conveyed nothing to France, though he did not like to wound the soldier's self-esteem

by saying so. With a kick at the body of his late adversary, Baudemanche wrenched out his dripping knife, with a deft and practised hand whipped off the tail, and turned his attention to the stag. France impulsively darted forward and caught his arm. He could not understand himself; he had seen beasts cornered and killed often on forest-wanderings, with his father, yet somehow the gallant yet hopeless defence, the broken, despairing pathos of the last leap, the utter helplessness now, went to his heart. . . . "Let him go," he urged. "God has saved you and me; let him go."

"Save a stag from the kill? But these fellows will be first if I don't. . . . Still . . ." He held his hand, grumbling and wondering; already the stag's eyes were glazed and turned, the lolling tongue was flecked with froth and blood. "Death himself saves us the work; he is ended."

CHAPTER X THE BATTLE OF THE FOOLS

"Lightly one fool cannot endure the sight of another."
OLD PROVERB.

§1

BAUDEMANCHE gave orders to the men who had scrambled down; there was an interchange of questions, instructions, commands between those clustered at the brink of the forest and those on the plateau below; nets and ropes were lowered, and with immense and painful effort the carcasses of stag and boar were raised to the upper world. France's leg hurt him badly —a nasty sprain, though luckily no worse—and the archer gave him a great, brown hand, and lifted him over the more difficult twists and corners of the zig-zag track. Among a crowd of foresters, beaters and hounds were several gentlemen; conspicuous among them the man on the fine black horse. Master and steed had seemed from below, against the background of sparse trees and blue sky, like some statue seen against the sky in the square of a city. The rider's hand, in its white glove, had been motionless as it grasped the rein; now it gave a slight movement, and the horse moved

forward two or three paces. Gems on the glove glittered in sunshine. Its wearer sat his horse superbly; the two might have been of one piece, modelled by some master-imager.

And the face was the handsome, melancholy face of Charles Monsieur.

Baudemanche went up to him with an awkward, and yet bold and independent salute. A fellow, evidently, this archer, of no small assurance, as if knowing his own value and that it was known to his master.

"Well, Baudemanche," said the Duke, with a smile very gracious and winning—Charles de Bourbon had the secret of winning hearts when it pleased him—"that was a nearer thing than ever in our wars together; I thought he had you. I cannot afford to lose my best archer—and for a haunch of venison, by St. Hubert! Nor yet, it seems," he added, "are you my worst huntsman."

"Oh, a Touraine quarry is not the Alps, my lord," answered Baudemanche, much gratified, and with a sidelong glance at France, "that little scramble was nothing to the Alps we crossed; and shall soon, I hope, cross again. But the brute nearly had me. A treacherous, Italian fellow; he was no good Frenchman, to lurk in a cave, and go for a turned back." He waved a bronzed sinewy hand towards the dead boar. "But this young gentleman it was who saved me, my lord," and he thrust France forward. The little group of gentlemen regarded him kindly, and France flushed red under his brown skin as he saw the great Duke's eyes fixed on him with interest.

Wonderful eyes, dark, soft, large, tinged with melancholy and a gloomy pride, yet very friendly and kind. And how noble the face looking down on him—and how splendid and lithe and graceful the figure, in its costly yet comparatively simple dress, made for activity in the saddle and in the chase! The boy did not know, or dream, that in some ways he himself was almost a little duplicate of this magnificence and beauty. Their eyes were alike, if France's as yet lacked the gloomy and melancholy pride, and were just the eyes of a handsome boy looking out eagerly on a coloured and

pictured world. His figure, not yet developed into manhood, or trained in the same school of arms and horsemanship, was yet akin in its litheness and gracefulness and suppleness. Of course his clothes were not to be compared with the rich if simple dress of this great Prince, but they were passable, and, now that he was with the choristers, no longer either coarse and scanty or bizarre and garish as in the days of his wanderings. In the group which had been near the Duke (but now he and France were alone as if on a stage with the chorus in the background, and even Baudemanche to his secret annoyance had been motioned aside) was a florid, shrewd-faced gentleman in hunting costume far more extravagant and ornate, yet somehow less dignified and impressive, than that of Bourbon; France had seen and heard talk of him at Loches; he was a court poet named Guillaume Crètin, and also an ecclesiast of some note, Canon of Vincennes and a great preacher, but much more interested (it was said) in hounds and falcons than in hunting human souls. He whispered to a gentleman beside him on a tall dapple horse with docked tail and cropped ears; this gentleman was younger, in mid middle-age, handsomely dressed in green and red, soldierly in bearing, and not bad looking, dark, with a bullet head and very assured manner. The second gentleman raised his eyebrows after looking hard at France, shrugged his shoulders almost imperceptibly, and replied in a low voice. The churchman, with his own eyes on France, smiled.

But Charles Monsieur was speaking.

"Come nearer, boy. You have done me a service, and it shall not be forgotten. The man you risked your life for is a good companion and comrade under me, who has served me too well for me to spare him for a death so wasteful. Tell me your tale. How came you there? 'Twas no easy a place to reach safely, even for my men, who have crossed Swiss rock and ice with me, and the passes into Italy; few others would venture it. Your leg is hurt? It shall be seen to." France told his story; of the choristers' picnic, and Glareanus their master; of the hunt seen passing in the forest, the

monks at the Chartreuse du Liget, the games, his adventure and mishap, the cave—the boar. He could not get out of memory the angry, fierce little eyes peering from semi-darkness, and the cruel glisten of the tusks. More than once he spoke of this.

Bourbon, his eyes searching the boy with curious interest, cut short his tale: "Who are you?" he asked abruptly. "Whence come you, and of what parentage?"

France wanted so much to invent a coloured story—of splendid ancestry, perhaps, under a cloud; in his day-dream since they had come into Loches, and he had seen pageantry, nobility, the glories and beauties of art, even royalty, at first hand and as one even in some small way part of them, he had dreamed and imagined many things. Already he was very different from the little boy in patched gabardine and sabots, or oftener bare feet, who had wandered, tumbled, played tricks with Lisette, sung in a beautiful voice ugly songs the meaning of which he only half understood, been thrashed and kicked mercilessly by a drunken and disgusting father, prayed and been frightened in churches, gone hungry and thirsty. He was well-clad, if plainly; although his grace and litheness had not gone, better and ampler food had done its work on him; he could read easily now, began to write a fair hand, knew a little of music otherwise than by ear, and had been almost unconsciously a mimic—as Lisette was mimic to himself—of the great and knightly folk with whom he came in contact. He envied them—oh, how much he envied them. If he too, like others of whom he heard, might only have his chance, and be by and by also something splendid and magnificent; a famous soldier perhaps, as Alec Maclean might be; a great noble and Prince like the lord now speaking to him; an advocate holding audiences by his eloquence; a painter whose works Popes and Dukes and Tyrants would admire and pay great sums for; a courteous and illustrious knight, glorious in the lists, renowned for chivalry, winning prizes under the bright eyes of high-born ladies. . . .

For almost the first time in his life, though these dreams of his had been inarticulate and scarcely realized

by himself, he was ashamed of confessing that old, disreputable father of his, and their past together. He wished he knew more of that ouche with the running stag. A running stag—and it was a stag running from the hunters which had brought him in talk with Charles Monsieur, whose name somehow seemed linked so curiously with his story. But under those sad, searching eyes truth must out. He glossed it a little. His mother, he said, was a most beautiful lady and kind to him; he could barely remember her, because she died when he was a very little child; he thought there was some vague story about her. He and his father had been wandering jesters and show folk, but he believed once his father had been chief Fool in a great castle. They had come to Loches to see King Louis after long journeyings in Touraine, Anjou, the Blésois, Berri, even into Poitou, and once to the sea-board. Oh, the country people liked them finely; Papa and he and Lisette could always keep a crowd a-gape, or holding its sides—Lisette was his little monkey. She slept with him at night in the *Salle des Fous*, because he did not want to leave her, they were such friends; and Papa was there too. If it were not for Lisette he would rather sleep with the other boys who sang for the King and Queen; but Master Glareanus said he did not want all the singing-boys scratching themselves before their Majesties and the Court. That was odd; several great nobles and ladies did scratch themselves. Of course Lisette like all monkeys had a few fleas, but she tried hard to catch them and was very clever at it—and then they were not big fleas at all, only very small ones Lisette had. . . . Some of the gentlemen overheard and tittered, but the Duke listened in grave silence. France suspected that he was not getting on too well—perhaps these were things great lords would not talk about, though of course they had them like other folk. He had often seen great lords, and ladies, with very filthy hands and nails, and they smelt when you were near them as if they had not washed for years. Flushing, France changed the subject; his father, he said, was in some trouble about an ouche with a running stag on it; the Queen had taken it away; but it had not

really been stolen, and he seemed to remember his mother (she was his mother, he felt sure) giving it to him when he was a very little boy, and she dying. There was a stag like it on a case to hold playing cards he had seen in a goldsmith's at Amboise; at Amboise, he said rather proudly, the young Duke of Amboise had seen his father and him and Lisette give their show, and had given him a gold angelot. France did not like to say more about this card-case, or about the book of arms the Queen had shown him, or her mysterious talk with her Confessor. Somehow it had slipped out. There had been trouble enough over the ouche already. And now, while the Duke watched the boy's face keenly without further word or question, the boy's eyes in their turn watched, but more shyly, the Duke's face; it gave no sign. Yet he was Charles Monsieur; the card-case was, the goldsmith had said, for him; under the running stag in the Queen's great book of heraldry was his name.

"Well, boy," said Bourbon when the tale was all done—and he spoke in a voice very gracious, very sweet, withal very high and noble—"you have done me a service in saving my archer Baudemanche, and I will have inquiry made, and see you well rewarded. I shall not forget." He rode back abruptly to his company, and gave some order. France was told to mount a grey Breton palfrey led by a page. His leg made mounting difficult, but, once in the saddle, he rode upright and well; his eyes once sought the Duke, and an odd thrill went through him when, at that moment, Bourbon glanced over his shoulder, and regarded him intently with approval. They rode in a great and glittering cavalcade to a clearing a mile or so distant where tents were set up. Here France's leg was dressed, but, to his chagrin, he had to give up the palfrey, and ride to Loches in one of the wagons carrying the toils and poles. Before the return he was given a good meal, and hippocras.

He slept in the *Salle des Fous;* his leg kept him awake a while, and when he managed to sleep, it was a sleep full of bright dreams out of which the snoring, coughing, spitting, parrot-cries and monkey-gibber—

and the barking and snarling of dogs—in their great, sordid dormitory awoke him. He could limp about without great pain or difficulty now, bacon fat and unguent having mended his leg a good deal. In the morning he saw Alec, who had fresh news of the coming war. The Scottish Archer listened with keen interest to the tale of his adventures in the forest, and especially to his recital of his interview with Bourbon. "Sainte Appoline's teeth!" he cried at last, in his odd burred French, "lad, you are in fortune's way! 'Tis not every common boy so great and proud a Prince takes notice of, and, if he has many faults, and is, they say, overweening in his pride and his ambition, he is princely in rewards for even petty service. That fellow Baudemanche, too—by the Rood, he is famous, that fellow; proud as his master, in his own cheaper way, the best archer in all France and winner of gold and silver arrows enough at the competitions of the Archers' Guilds to slay a regiment if they were real; a brave soldier whose name is renowned among common soldiers and great captains alike—and much renowned among ladies. The Duke sets great store by him. Yes, France, you are on fortune's highway at last."

§2

And Bourbon did not forget. He was, with his faults, princely in all he did, and never forgot a service; alack that he could also never forget a disservice or a slight. In his scrutiny and questioning he had given far more than casual heed to the boy, whom he had noticed for a flashing instant among the crowd on the day he rode into Loches. Very likely also he had asked a casual question, possibly even Queen Anne—possibly Yves de Maheuc, her Confessor—possibly, though improbably, the King—had told him something. More than once France, passing a group of nobles, had overheard someone in the group say that the handsome boy might be Charles Monsieur in a Venice diminishing mirror, so far as his face went. He had not taken much heed. But Bourbon himself must have noted this.

That evening the King gave another banquet at Loches. After it was dancing, by torches; there were

many dances, new and old; some which had been introduced, with so many other things good and bad, from Italy; the slow, stately passy-measure, the pavan, even more stately perhaps, and the passy-measure pavan, a wild, rollicking dance, in which the dancers rolled about as though drunk—several, indeed, were. Then there were the quick movement and music of galliards; the branle, danced to four bars of song and flute; the simple branle, double branle; even branles of different states and provinces, such as those of Burgundy and of Champagne. Some of these country folk were brought in to dance before the royalties and their guests. These dances, varying very slightly, had queer names; the pea branle, the mustard branle, the horses' branle, and even the laundresses' branle, when hands were clapped to imitate the wooden beetle doing its work. In the torch branle a flambeau was passed from hand to hand, gentlemen and ladies taking it in turn. Then there was the barse dance, and that other ancient dance the baladine, the first popular among the aristocracy but not in much use among common folk.

France sang at intervals with the boys; the great hall was hung with tapestries specially chosen, and some even brought from other palaces because of their value and richness and importance; on one wall hung the glorious tapestry of the Fall of Troy brought over from the *Salle des États* at Blois. The music, the lights, the laughter, the painted figures on the tapestries seeming to fill the hall with figures of antiquity almost as real and life-like as those of the living day, filled the boy with delight. He loved music; it carried one right away as on the magic carpet or magic horse of the tales, so that the unreal became real, the impossible possible, and one lived in magnificent if unattainable worlds until its spell was broken. The meanest might, for a little space, cross the frontier into that splendid, impossible kingdom unlike any other on earth—of Cathay; from which the ignorant said a letter had once reached King Louis and other Kings and Potentates inviting them to come and see what magnificence, and beauty, and prosperity, really were. No; the wise said there were no horses born, no boats built, no roads

made, by which any might enter that fabled realm of dreamland. But music took one there at once.

The boys had not sung for some time; they stayed in the gallery with Glareanus, enjoying the feast of colour and light and sound. A very lively tricotet struck up. Bourbon was at the King's dais; he had not danced often this night, but sat moody and reflective, though now and then rousing himself to speak with courtesy and some show of animation to the King or Queen; rarely to any other. The Queen sat at a small dais by herself, with Breton Guards and her ladies near her; she was powdered and pencilled to-night, her eyebrows black and plucked, her lips and cheeks vermilion, looking very young and in better health than ordinarily—she had a strong face, full of character, but not beautiful otherwise. As always she had her own dishes and trenchers, and ate daintily. After the relays of fish, meat, game, prodigal in their numbers and abundance, had come sweetmeats and more wines. The King was flushed with drink, though he had eaten sparingly of plain dishes; boiled beef, he would say sometimes, was the best dish for any King or subject. When the quick and lively dance ended, Bourbon bent over to the Queen, and spoke. An order was given, and buffoons, monsters, jesters, and playing folk in masks and bizarre costumes poured into the hall to afford fresh amusement to the guests. France knew many of them, but not all. The *Salle des Fous* must almost have emptied itself. There was Triboulet, his father's enemy and rival, with his goggle eyes starting and rolling, his hump and flat stomach, his long, dangling arms like those of some great ape, his colossal nose which would have made scores of little red pimpled buttons like the nose of poor Papa Caillette. He sat at the end of a long bench with others of his kin, but some master-fool more important than Triboulet was busy already, with cox-comb and bells, and sharp tongue and witty sallies, retorting on those at the dais who bandied words with him, and poor Triboulet sat neglected. He amused himself meanwhile, and others near him, with by-play of his own, making his face even more grotesque than in

nature by his grimaces, weeping noisily when the master-fool scored some point by a merry jest or repartee (but Triboulet had a curious command of real tears at will, and a reputation for laughing to show sadness, weeping to show gladness; he used no onion). Interjecting running comments in a low voice, he patted himself on his hump in approval when he had raised a titter on the bench. (Besides, a touched hump brings luck.) France watched him now and then, though the boy's eyes were chiefly on Bourbon, taciturn, cold, and for the most part left alone by the master-fool, who spoke quite fearlessly and impudently to King Louis, but did not venture conclusions with the King's princely guest. Once only did this master-fool make a comment at all cutting when Bourbon spoke. The Duke was talking of the coming campaign, and said something about the drums going into Italy. "Ah, monseigneur," asked the Fool slyly, "and will you take our drums into Italy without our drums being beaten?" Not all in France thought that these Italian ventures were worth the risk and pain. The Duke's rejoinder came in a flash. "Then shall we make new drums of Fools' skins," he retorted, "which are seasoned to beatings."

It was at this moment the arras drew aside; in came, ushered by guards, Papa Caillette, and, led by him gingerly by her gilded chain, Lisette in feathered hat, frock and bells; she leapt, mowed, showed tiny white teeth. She had been thrashed too often by Caillette to bear him much good will, but France could do anything he liked with her. Bourbon turned to glance at the newcomer, and it flashed across France's mind that he had asked for Papa to be brought in; the Queen had sent for him. . . . Papa was decked in striped green and white; he was pompous, and elated at the summons, evidently; but evidently also just a little nervous; his cheeks were an unhealthy waxen yellow, in which his little, pimpled nose shone like a small red lamp. He winked at France, and Lisette whimpered with joy and strained at her chain on seeing the boy, and tried to reach him, but was hauled sharply back. An abrupt order was given that Charles Caillette

was to sit with the monkey on the bench near Triboulet, and wait until the royal pleasure about them was known.

At last Triboulet filled a gap between music and dances with his entertainment. He did his utmost. He played the bagpipes which had first drawn the King's notice to him when he was a ragamuffin playing them in the streets of Tours, and indeed he played very well; lively, martial airs; melancholy love music interspersed with the wailing of lovers; imitations of court and town and country sounds, his voice accompanying his primitive instrument; one heard the cries of vendors in the streets, selling wines, water, relics, fruit, pots and pans; the creak of carts entering a city; the screaming of babies, the crowing of cocks, the angry bark of falcons, the mooing of cows, the caterwauling of cats and barking of ban-dogs; a hundred and one sounds cleverly mimicked. Then, putting aside his pipes for a time, he sang at great speed an alliterative song full of topical allusions, some very obscene; this was catchy, and several, even among the personages, echoed the chorus as best they could; King Louis himself beat time with brown, gouty fingers on the board. His voice was a little like a frog's, but this made the song none the less clever and amusing. After that he asked riddles and told tales. Most of these were as old as Ararat, but raised a laugh none the less. He told about the man with a house to sell who took round a single brick as a sample. He told of the man who looked for daylight with a candle; of the burghers in a town who built their Guild-houses without windows, and tried to catch sunlight in cages to fill it with; of the man who bought a raven to see if it was true that ravens lived two hundred years; of the man who shook the bough laden with sparrows because he wanted to see them fall; of the horseman who put his bundle on his back when in the saddle to save his horse, and the horseman who spurred his restive horse to make it keep still, and still another horseman who, spurring his horse on one flank, said that it was sufficient as the other flank was sure to follow.

Triboulet mopped his brow, and at a motion retired.

He had raised some laughter, the guests being in a mood to laugh easily; but one could see he was only indifferently pleased with his reception. Papa Caillette's face meanwhile was a study in contempt. Several times he half-turned towards France, gave a sly wink, put the tip of his broad, whitish-red tongue out, shrugged, pursed up his full, sagging lips and wrinkled his narrow brow; he counted off on his fingers, jest after jest, riddle after riddle, tale after tale, which each knew was in the old book, and familiar among jesters in all ages and all lands. Another chestnut—another; fit for yokels, but for a King's hall and board? . . . The fellow was a charlatan; the Fool a fool.

His own chance came at last. Hitherto his efforts to draw the attention of the King, or Queen, as he had bragged to France he meant to do one day, had failed. For him no chance meetings, no intentionally-accidental running into Majesty, being reproved or sworn at, making his peace and opportunity at once by a witty and pre-devised speech. On a day when the King was passing near the *Salle des Fous* he had tried to station himself in the way, and draw attention to himself by some clever buffoonery, but had been ordered peremptorily within by the warders. And yet, at a time when least expected or hoped for, his opening had come; before this splendid audience, in all this gorgeousness of setting; tapestries and banners around and over him, the vast hall cleared for the dance, but still some great tables, laden with gold, silver-gilt, silver, rare glass, with great folk sitting at them—and Triboulet, his rival, failing so lamentably. Some laughter, yes; but Triboulet had really fallen very flat. Why, a hundred country audiences had roared themselves helpless when Papa Caillette had told exactly the same tales—but one had to know how to tell them, and make them always fresh.

At last he had his chance.

§3

He stood there in an open space before the royalties, and all that fine audience waiting to be amused. There

were embassies, nobles, churchmen, great advocates, ministers, generals. The Bretagne King of Arms, Pierre Choque, stood in his splendid uniform near the Queen. Trivulzio was there, with his white, curly hair, black moustache, and snub nose. There were the two King's Heralds; one in parti-coloured hose of purple and green, one in blue and pink, with vests of cloth-of-gold, and tabards bearing the fleur-de-lys, and lilies on blue flags pendent from the trumpets. Men in partial armour bore flambeaux, and torches flamed in fiery red, in smoky ochre, from silver sconces on the old walls.

The torches were to light *him*. The music hushed to let *him* speak. Oh, the great day—the great chance—the great fortune and future! But the immensity of his opportunity abashed him, not easily abashed. So much hung on it. He himself might hang on it! Even now his neck ached sometimes when he thought of the risk this visit to Loches had brought him into, and that even now this risk might not be altogether over. The King was clement; but a King's favour was like the wind, and one wandering Fool and Player in France was no great count, when regiments and famous captains marched at the royal word, and faded behind Alpine mists, and came no more.

His legs trembled; his voice failed him, and he looked again and again towards France for encouragement. He had devised and planned and emerged successfully, triumphantly, from some such essay as this so often in dreams of day or night; had bragged of it so much; and now his part had slipped from him. How was he to begin? He wanted his cue, and France could not give it. France looked from his father to Bourbon, toying now with some sugared almonds, but with his eyes on Caillette; looked back to his father, uncouth, slack-mouthed, huge-eared, pimpled, sottish, foolish. A pretty father, to speak of to a great and splendid lord! He was ashamed, and ashamed of his shame. Sometimes Papa had been kind to him, and they had braved many things together.

The audience waited; quite inadvertently Caillette raised a titter, and this gave him the needed spur. In his indecision he had put a finger in his mouth, and

sucked at it while he tried to collect his thoughts and pluck up resolution. He looked his part—the perfect Fool. A tug, after his old habit, at the vast ears, and courage, brought to the sticking point, stuck and stayed. He pulled himself together suddenly. Triboulet on the bench, uncertain whether he had done well or ill, but certain enough that he had not done so well as he had hoped, eyed his enemy malevolently, a jeer already near his twisted mouth. Caillette saw it coming, and a flash of inspiration which came very near to genius started him off. In an instant he had hunched up his podgy frame, so that between his shoulders seemed a hump like that of his rival; the rounded stomach drew in; his little eyes stared and goggled, and, though natural means could help him hardly at all with the nose, he grabbed suddenly a pistolet of bread, moistened it, moulded it in his stubby hands, and clapped it on. There, before a laughing audience, was a passable imitation of his enemy. He wept, howled, laughed inanely; glancing round with apparent innocence, he saw that he had gained the eyes of his audience, and their ears. He began with imaginary pipes. Hideous, discordant, screeching noises mocked Triboulet's playing. He imitated with his mouth the sounds of city, country, court, sometimes very grossly. Some lord flung him a silver coin; another motioned a servant to hand him a great mazer, of maple rimmed with silver-gilt, from which he drank noisily and deeply. Ah, that was better; his fears went. And now he began his riddles and jests and tales; but first with exactly the same instances, told somewhat differently but in the same manner and tone, as those Triboulet had just recited. The audience was expectant, knew what was coming, saw the coarsely skilful parody which used monotony for emphasis, yet embroidered sufficiently for novelty; poor Triboulet, writhing and mouthing on his bench, and now and then almost starting to his feet in fury, became popinjay for shafts, and was impotent. His name was never mentioned; he was not even pointed at; but every shaft told. There was once a man who wanted to sell a house—a man who looked for day with a candle—a man who bought a raven—a horseman

—another horseman—— The voice was almost Triboulet's own. But, in Papa's own natural voice, which was odd enough itself in all conscience, were added coarsely witty little homilies or morals, hitting at great folk present, at foreign Princes and statesmen and soldiers. He had a certain rough shrewdness, a fair arsenal of homely sarcasm and rude wit. His Holiness was the horseman who, wishing peace and good-will on earth, used the spur to keep mankind peaceable and loving; the English King owned the raven which was to live two centuries—his realm, which might pass from him or from which he might pass in a day; and even King Louis himself, since fools were privileged, was not spared; with good sunshine in France, was he not making cages to bring in Italian sun? Was he not shaking boughs to see sparrows fall to the ground? After each jest, each story, he took a phrase Triboulet had coined and was proud of: "Cockles and good gossips, I have said my say." For a few moments he turned himself into Adam after the fall putting Triboulet's riddles to Eve. All her answers were wrong and foolish; and when he told her the replies, she said to each: "Oh, but you told me that before we were turned from Eden."

He dropped Triboulet abruptly, as one might drop something unpleasant which has been picked up and held at a distance with the nose between finger and thumb. No more of that cuckoo in the ninnies' nest, though he admitted his impromptus were sometimes smart—he spent so many hours in rehearsing them! And now Papa, after a lengthy pull at the strong, spiced wine, played his own proper rôle. To tell truth he did not scruple to retail chestnuts which Triboulet had missed. Every Fool, even the greatest and most famous, played chiefly with few variations on one and the same string; the old stories ran through their patter like King Louis's "D" in the Motet. As in a chivalrous company tales of horses and horsemen were always in favour, he told that yarn from his dog's-eared book of the rider who, when his horse stumbled and broke its own neck and its master's, exclaimed: "He has never played us that trick before." Then

there was the story of the wives mourning their husbands, one of whom said: "Make another light in the room, for he did love light; God grant him light everlasting," which the other capped: "And make another fire, for my husband did like fire; may God grant him fire everlasting." Not unlike this was his story of the man who, on a hot day, forgetting that the wife of his friend was lately dead, said: "I hope she does not find the heat very disagreeable." At the King's dais sat the Archbishop of Lyon, who looked glum over these, but others laughed. Gibes at the church and church doctrines were popular just now; Caillette had a stock of them. He narrated a new one he had made about Pope Julius and his quince jelly. His tale of the Dean of Besançon's friend who, hearing the Dean had died, said: "Don't believe a word of it; he tells me everything, and when I saw him last he said nothing about it," went better. So did a nearly new story of a lady who ran behind her husband unexpectedly and kissed him; when reproved, she said: "Oh, pardon, my dear husband; I did not know it was you." There were the stories of the man who cut a great hole in a ship to see something that had fallen overboard; of the fellow who complained that the sun did not keep its heat for winter when it was needed; of the bailiff who told his lord he had bought a pig "just your lordship's size," and the peasant who won a pig at a fair for having lived amicably with his wife for many years—and, when the pig ran away, forgot his wife in the excitement of chasing and retrieving it; of the yokel who bought a last year's almanac and made a fortune by following its out-of-date predictions; of the man who married the wrong woman because he was too shy to protest; the man who, advised by his doctor to take a walk each morning on an empty stomach, asked: "On *whose?*" Most were less innocent. He raised chuckles by interchanging consonants or vowels in words to give them bawdy meanings; he rattled off imbecilities, keeping a simple face—"I thought this would be the end of it, and I was right, for it is not over yet"—"Not a man arrives safely nowadays from a journey without being murdered and robbed"—"The army had

no drums but bagpipes"—"We put them to the sword with our bows and arrows"—"We carried empty bottles full of wine"—"Monseigneur St. Paul found an uninhabited island, whose natives gave him food." . . . Not all his tales and not all his patter were old, or very old. He had picked up stories on the road, from men and women of all ranks, all occupations; soldiers, friars, pedlars, peasants, lights-of-love flaunting their trade by the sign of the draggling kerchief; from such ne'er-do-wells or out-laws as the thief (whom they called "*capon*")—the "*rifodé*" or vagrant, the "*franc-mitou*" or beggar; he had learnt the many tricks of their profession, and had one tale of a man who, when wearing a board labelled "Blind!" was challenged because he betrayed his ability to see, retorted: "Oh, the board is the wrong way round; I am deaf and dumb to-day." Many of his tales were of his own invention, and born after painful gestation and labour, but these were not often the most successful. He hit out once at Triboulet in an impromptu—saying that some set themselves up to be jesters, but were soon set down again by those who heard them. Triboulet had sat drinking and glowering; he now attempted to fling himself upon Caillette with a wooden sword he had, but Caillette, pursing out his lips, wrenched it from him, and swaggered up and down—a very cock-of-the-walk—again assuming his former imitation, and patting his simulated hump in mockery.

He had raised, certainly, a great deal of noisy laughter; but his performance was not yet ended. Suddenly, rotund and awkward as he was, he turned a double summerset; lay prostrate, and lifted himself up slowly by his great ears; he had several tricks. Every moment he feared lest the audience should tire of him, and King Louis give the signal for him to be taken away. Indeed, the King's attention wandered; in a panic of apprehension lest, after all, his chances might be spoilt, Caillette dragged Lisette towards him by the chain, and, as a diversion, tried to make the monkey do her tricks. She was vicious, obstinate, scared of the glare and noise; with the elder Caillette she was rarely obedient, except through fear or pain. She

mowed, snarled, defied him. She splashed over the wine in the mazer instead of drinking it; bit her hoop in two; refused to fire a tiny bombard. The audience laughed against him now, instead of with him. He tossed Lisette savagely aside after two or three futile efforts—"Wait, my lady; you shall yet be dessert to my feast"—and broke into a song he had made which was generally, with country audiences, an infallible laughter-raiser; this too fell flat. Suddenly, casting round a despairing glance, his eyes fell again on France among the boys in the musicians' gallery. He beckoned to him, called to him, turned to King Louis and said: "Majesty, the best is to come; you shall see now what merriment my lad and I can make together."

And France saw Bourbon's eyes on the disreputable, foolish sot straining to out-rival Triboulet with sorry tales and imbecilities and cheap witticisms—but in the end losing his advantage—and then on the boy who was himself, and whom that great Prince had promised to honour and reward. . . . His father! Shame flooded over him. Not the meanest serving-man, not the obscurest man-at-arms scarred with honourable wounds, but he would rather have owned now for father. And France, it seemed, must himself make foolish sport, and join in silly plays and dialogues, and tumble, and sing the bawdy songs he had tried to forget. They left so foul a taste on a palate knowing clean food.

The King had leant forward; France could not overhear what passed, but a swollen, gouty finger made a sign. He had to go. He stood there, flushed, self-conscious, miserable; some of his boy-companions had tittered when he left them. He overheard a mercer's son who had been jealous of his voice say some contemptuous words about his grotesque parentage. "Now, *my son*"—began Papa. He knew, though until lately he had not troubled his head much about his looks, that many eyes were on them both, and many minds thinking: "A strange pair—an odd contrast. Father and son, then!" There was a threat in Papa's little pig-like eyes, his narrow, bent brow—and how hideous were the enormous pendent ears he tugged,

the slack, foolish mouth, the tiny, red, pimpled nose. . . .

Some scrap of dialogue from the old song about Grégoire, the innkeeper, ran in the boy's mind; the ale-wife reproved her husband:

"Oh, you eternal pot-house sot!
Sack of wine, vile swiller of it,
My broomstick soon shall be your lot,
If you don't come home this minute."

Papa had often had an irate woman's broomstick about his head and shoulders. And then the earlier verse:

"Gregory has a rare wide throat. . . .
He has but one button upon his coat,
But upon his nose he has thirty."

Nauseous, filthy in body and mind, ugly, brutal and a bully, picking up livelihood as a laughing-stock for others to ridicule; selling himself for ridicule and proud to be a Fool. Yet, unless there were any truth in mere surmises and hints—*his father*. Memories of old harshnesses, old cruelties, merciless flagellations, kicks, of times when he himself had gone thirsty and cold and hungry and neglected while his father spent their meagre earnings in drink, surged over him. Now, contrasted against his last few months, these days seemed terrible as they had not seemed when they were being endured by a child who had known nothing better. Of course it had not all been unhappiness. He had enjoyed part of his work, enjoyed very much the applause and admiration. Certain happy days on the road, on heath and in woodland and by riverbank, stayed on the walls of the mind like pleasant landscapes. His father had had his moods of camaraderie and kindliness; had been generous now and then. . . . But . . .

France took the end of Lisette's gilded chain; the monkey, with a tiny, bubbling cry, leapt towards him, and was obedient, but turned now and then to mow and grimace and spit towards his father. France put her through her old tricks. She doffed cap to the King, grimaced when the Pope's name was mentioned, became unmanageable at the word "Italians," drank wine from

the re-filled mazer, fired the bombard, mimicked portly burgesses, their wives, warriors, civic dignitaries, judges on the bench, drunken men; leapt through another coloured hoop, and played parrot on it to the life. But France had forgotten or did not choose to remember his ancient patter while all this was going on. His father bent angry brows on him, and rattled out his own accompaniment of nonsense. The boy had changed out of knowledge. He was no longer docile, but obstinate as an ass, a mule, the monkey herself; swollen with a new conceit and self-love—and one who has self-love, he had once said sententiously (quoting from his book) is lucky, for he has no rival to fear. Very well. He should pay for it later; he was not yet out of the *Salle des Fous* of nights, though he had made such grand friends, and thought himself so big. All these thoughts were an under-current to his own patter. Lisette, he told the King and Queen, and Bourbon, was a formidable little warrior; she had made many run in her time—by running away, and forcing them to run after her. Such valour was not uncommon in war, among men. He pointed a blunt finger at her. "Look at her now, good lords and ladies. Just so looked the fat dame in the great bed, when she could not find her little husband in the morning, because he had hidden behind her beam. And now. . . . Is she not just like that lady-paramount who could not raise troops for the King's service because, quoth she, she had never been able to raise a man for herself, but had been forced to stay spinster?" Indeed, Lisette could look very ancient and acidulated when she chose. . . . Papa whispered an aside to France angrily. "Play up before these great people, you little fool, and do not spoil the chance of our lives. What has come to you? By St. Gatier the Glorious, I'll buy your next cap in Paris; even Loches caps are not big enough for you now. There are good caps and straps in the Street of Bad Boys."

France tried to throw off his mal-content; he urged Lisette on to new ventures, said a witty thing or two which made the great folks laugh, tumbled for them—but less well than for the country-folk of old times—

and, still rather sulkily, gave his father tit for tat in three or four of their little plays and dialogues, Lisette doing her part. "Now sing to them," said his father, better at ease; and he sang. A bawdy song or two first, from their repertoire; but these sickened him now; he broke out suddenly into a song which was sweet, and clean, and pleasant. His shame went. Bourbon, (he knew), and the Queen (he guessed) were staring at him with a new interest and curiosity. Two or three old lords grumbled among themselves; what entertainment was there in this stuff—in this, about roses, and time, and the heart? Time passed; life faded; death came to all—one did not want to have that rubbed in. The more need for drink, for mirth, for ribaldry, for forgetfulness that youth was gone and age already going. But he sang, and soon was unconscious of all present, these sweet and pleasant songs of his; and a hush fell, and when muttering broke silence voices said: "Hush! Hush!"

"Fades the rose; the year grows old;
The tale is told;
Youth doth depart—
Only stays the heart.

Ah no! If stays the heart,
Youth can ne'er depart,
Nor the sweet tale be told—
Never the rose fade, nor the year grow old."

The bannered, glittering hall grew strangely still.

CHAPTER XI ST. VALLIER

"Lend me a Fool's heart and a woman's eyes."
TIMON OF ATHENS, ACT V, SC. I.

§1

CHARLES CAILLETTE went back with the motley company to the *Salle des Fous* in a quaver of uncertainty; how well had he done? How ill? He was more than a little jealous of the boy. A song or two fit for old women, for children, for silly love-

sick swains and maids, had made more impression than all his topicalities, impudences, buffooneries, spiced though they were to suit palates liking hot fare. France had been bidden to stay behind with the boys. Papa and Triboulet exchanged spiteful sallies which ended in a rough-and-tumble. Triboulet had the last word and last venomous spit, but Papa gave the last blow, on a nose no fist could miss. There was plenty of drink going. Caillette, half-fuddled on his return, was already taking a rosier view of the night's results when a messenger arrived who put him in a fresh scurry of hopes and fears. Surely now he was to be rewarded, enlarged, promoted; his merits had found their chance, and at last been recognized and appreciated at their true value. . . . Or—what if his thrust into the blaze of publicity and notice had brought back to the King's mind, and the Queen's, the almost-forgotten business of the ouche? He shook with renewed terror. Would it not have been wiser to have left well alone, and been content with fairly comfortable obscurity? Supposing the King and Queen (perhaps even their great guest) had discussed him unfavourably, and sent for him again in order to confirm the sentence with which he had been threatened? His neck, which had forgotten to ache, again tingled; his head again felt uneasy and insecure.

He followed the messenger in a welter of uncertainty, up and down between optimism and pessimism as a bucket goes up and down between water and sky in the well. Through the little postern, over the drawbridge, through courtyards, along narrow passages cut in rock, Caillette passed back to the *Logis du Roy* from which, so long before, he had come in disappointment, humiliation and apprehension. But it was not to the King's or the Queen's apartments he was taken, in that vast, pinnacled Palace which made a tiny town within the larger town of the Château of the town of Loches itself. More corridors, another postern, a small courtyard, its walls festooned with creepers and valerian from which Gothic windows peered like bushily-browed eyes. . . . Arras was drawn aside and a door scratched; a deep voice, clear and resonant as a bell, bade them enter.

He went in, blinking, fuddled, nervous yet trying to bluster—his mind striving desperately to clear and collect itself—and found himself in a small elegant room lined with rare tapestries, but here and there on a wall space were paintings, and on a table of black oak, elegantly carved, were more paintings on some of which the paint seemed hardly dry; there were colours, too, on slabs of glass, gold-leaf, beaters-skin, brushes and hæmatite pencils, and books in covers beautifully tooled, with gold clasps set with jewels; and music. Most of all this had been set aside in apparent haste to make a clear space before a man sitting on a carved oak chair at the table. The floor was paved with green and white tiles, nearly covered with Eastern rugs. There was an atmosphere about the room, a distinction, lacking in the cruder magnificence of the King's own apartments. Caillette was acute enough to notice this. Small oil paintings on the walls were by Italian artists of the first rank. Since King Charles the Eighth had been in Italy treasures of art had poured in a steady stream across the Alps and across the sea into France from country of dreams, conquests and failures; many Frenchmen of the older school deplored this, saying that French art was now unappreciated in its native home, while any Italian rubbish was praised and valued. Often one found the walls of châteaux, country houses, churches, defaced by foreign artists who, because of the rage for alien art, were allowed to cover beautiful French frescoes, mellowed by age and made sacred by associations, with garish colours and bizarre draughtmanship. . . . But these were exquisite little works, not mere random loot or fashionable mimicry; the artists were masters, the chooser of the pictures one evidently who knew and appreciated work of genius. Everything in the apartment, small as it was, was chosen and arranged in perfect taste; the whole atmosphere suggested an occupant cultured, refined, wealthy, insistent on the best, and perhaps even a dabbler in art himself.

Bourbon, the master of this room for the time, and the owner of the treasures brought with him to embellish after his liking his chambers during his visit,

had thrust aside most of the costly or indifferent litter on the table, but was examining more or less carelessly through a glass some cameos taken from a gilded or golden bowl near him, while he waited for Caillette's coming. He did not speak for a minute, and Papa stood apprehensively, wondering, hoping, fearing, and all the time wishing his head were clearer, and that the face of the great lord who had summoned him were not bent in shadow so that he was unable to mark its expression and get his cue. He himself was forced to stand in sunlight, and could conceal no change of countenance. Once in that spell of waiting, during which Caillette breathed hard, and rumbled once or twice uncontrollably in his stomach, which he heartily wished among the stomachs of the million little fishes in the Indre, the Duke turned a flashing glance out of obscurer light upon him; the large, luminous dark eyes were astonishingly like France's, and made Caillette still more uncomfortable and fearful. The Duke put down an intaglio, and dipped his delicately formed hand covered with jewelled rings, even to the thumb, back into the bowl to take out something that Caillette recognized at once as the ouche on the history of which his future might depend. Bourbon played with the brooch, looked at it idly, and then shot out suddenly, in a suave, pleasant, but very authoritative voice trained by long command, "I hear you are the father of the singing-boy who saved my archer Baudemanche, and know something of this ouche the Queen has given me. . . . Tell me its history."

Papa gasped; a hand shot up to scratch his matted head; it stopped to grasp, instead, the gigantic lobe of an enormous ear, and its fellow seized the second lobe—he tugged, after his old fashion when agitated or in doubt. "Stomachs of a thousand fishes!" he thought to himself, "it has come, and to-night, with these Princes playing me, I may be on the hook altogether." He mumbled something, but no distinct sound came. His slack mouth opened and shut ludicrously like that of a fish trying to keep life when hauled on a waterless bank. Bourbon waited.

In a space he grew impatient, and said more sharply:

"Well. . . . I do not stay to hear inventions, but the truth. It will be well for you to speak that. My device is on the ouche; I remember it years back, and it was my brother's at Moulins when I was a boy. I order you to tell me all you know, and I have means at hand of checking what you say. I have, you will know, authority. For you much may hang on what you tell me, and whether you speak truth frankly and fully."

("A hundred mustard devils!" reflected Caillette, "Why, I may hang on that myself!")

He blurted out suddenly, seeing no help for it: "My lord, by their lordships the Saints and by the Rood, I will tell you all truly. Faith, though, 'tis little enough in the telling. I was Kitchen-Fool once in the castle of my lord Imbert de Verci, the Seigneur de Belmont, and there was a young chamber-woman to my lord's wife whom I loved. She was very beautiful and well-spoken, but proud, and laughed at me, though I was a personable enough lad and of good parts, my lord. As your good lordship may have seen last night I can dance, sing, tell a tale, and I have always had good fortune among ladies——"

Bourbon motioned him to go on, and be brief. A little crestfallen, for he loved to recount the exploits of his earlier life, and had often, when France was very small and more innocent than now, impressed upon the boy that he had a father to be proud of—a father of incredible ability and unparalleled good looks which time, perhaps, had dealt rather hardly by—Caillette continued: "Enough of that, as you say, Excellency, for indeed I was never one to like blowing my own trumpet. More assurance, and I might have made a better figure in the world. . . . This lady, Simone Becherau by name, would have none of me, though I felt 'twas unnatural in her, and there must be some other reason than mis-liking when I could twist most women to my will very easily. But one night when I had known her a long month, and wooed her every day, and every day been treated with contumely—though prettily so, making me more intent on her (my poor Simone) there was a knocking at my door near cock-crow, and when I rubbed my eyes and opened it

she entered. I slept in a tiny den of my own in one of the spur towers, up a broken, winding stair. She stood there very pale, shivering though it was a hot night (and I remember how the mosquitoes droned) with only a cloak round her as she had come from her naked bed; and her eyes were wild and angry. It amazed me to see her; my heart leapt with joy, yet somehow I was queerly sorry, for I had met a good girl at last, and while I was glad in one part, at having conquered, and because I wanted her, in another I thought 'twas pity. She came of good country stock, my poor Simone." His manner had changed; it was even tinged with a curious dignity.

Bourbon, playing with the ouche, said gravely: "Go on, but spare me your thoughts, and tell facts."

"My lord, she was a girl I had never touched, and she had never let me; besides, I swear I had known her but two months or so. Yet I saw now what I had never seen nor suspected; her buxomness had another cause than I had thought. . . . A cock crew; it was near dawn, and the stables and women's quarters seen through my tiny window showed against a sky just tinged with red. A cock crew—and 'twas a cock crew at betrayal. . . ."

He spoke with a singular feeling; more freely, and with some rough eloquence, because, perhaps, the wine helped now that he was fairly begun. Bourbon, but without impatience now, signed him to go on.

"I knew then that I loved her, as I had loved no woman before; and I knew. . . . I knew. . . . I looked at her, and she at me, and my throat was dry; but I said nothing, though I tried; nor did I make a step towards her to clip and buss her, as I had often tried to do in vain. And there she was. . . . She said: 'Good Fool-Charlot——' (they called me that when I was a youth at Belmont) 'you may take me if you will, and as soon as you will, in wedlock; and if my lady asks, my lord will not say nay to us. Be as pitiful to me as you can, good Fool-Charlot.'

"I said huskily: 'But is it your wish, Simone? For I love you, and now because I love you will not take you against your free will.'

"'It is my wish, Charlot; be as good and as pitiful to me as you can, if you say yes. And if you say no, why, I will make my bed with the first serf I meet this day, the first soldier on the road, the first wayfarer, be he beggar or thief or outcast, who says yes to me. Oh God, Oh God, Oh God,' she gasped, but her eyes were dry, and they looked at me all wildly, and desperately, and sadly. . . . So I said: 'Yes, Simone, but who was it?' She said proudly: 'That I may never tell, but he was no mean man; a Prince and a great lord he was, and I have no shame of him, nor will not accuse him, for I love him; and yet I hate him too.'

"So we were married, Excellency, as quick as priest could do it, and I wished to be a good husband to her, but wishes are saddles without horses strong enough to bear them, very often. Stomachs of a hundred fishes, my lord, she did her best, poor lass; but I was always a Solomon for women, and Jonah's whale for drink. And she carrying another man's child."

Bourbon tapped the table with the tips of his fingers; for a few seconds the room was silent, but for the tiny drumming of his tap. From Glareanus' room in the *Logis du Roy* came a boy's voice singing some love-song; a lute accompanied; it was not very good, and the strident voice of Glareanus broke in suddenly and angrily. The love-song ceased. Bourbon said abruptly: "Who was this Prince and great lord, then? Did you find out?"

"She would not tell me, my lord; not then, nor when the boy was born. I did not know how true her tale was; great lords and even Princes came often to Belmont, for the Seigneur Imbert de Verci had many friends among notable folk; and then there was much coming and going, with our armies across the Alps. . . . One night I was a-bed with her, and perhaps I had had much to drink, and had not been too kind to her. The baby lay in her arm, and whimpered, and she cuddled him closer. I said something, perhaps, of a man having his good nights spoilt by another's bastard and another's leman, and when she answered sharply (she was wont to be gentle in her ways) I dragged away the child, and beat her. She bore her

beatings as quietly as she could, my poor Simone, setting her teeth, and her eyes perhaps glinting a little; but her pride had all gone, or almost so; it seemed as if something had broken within her, which angered me. Only this night she answered me sharply, and took back the child and fondled him, and said: 'Poor, poor baby mine, and you are all mine now, for your father has died far away from us and will never come back, and there is no help for us both but God's help, and Our Lady's who for her little boy bore shame and grief.' Or some such words she said. I struck her again, harder and oftener than I meant, for I was very angry, and not clear of my drink; and she slight and small, and not strong as a horse like some thick-made country-woman who takes the stick well. Of course a man has a right to beat his own wife, my lord, but not, I own, too harshly. She sickened badly and died not long after, and I often think—for I loved her with all her faults—that if she hadn't died she might have been living now." He gave a sidelong glance at Bourbon, who did not smile, but said: "continue." "When she was at death's door, with a leech trying to pull her through (which he did at last, and dead folk tell no tales of doctors) I found in her few things the ouche, with a running stag on it, and had seen that very ouche once at Belmont. But later I could not find it, and it seems she gave it just before the end to the little boy." He knew how Bourbon's eyes, for all his seeming indifference, read him through and through, and perhaps drink as well as fear relaxed his tongue. This great Prince, young as he still was, was not one to brook a lie. Speaking truth was clearly the better and safer game to play. Papa Caillette moistened his lips with his tongue—how thirsty all this made him!—and from time to time glanced at the Duke side-long, to see how his words were being taken. With any other, with the King even, he might have played imbecile, jester, simpleton, and cracked jokes to confuse issues; somehow he could not. He had rarely spoken so truly and so simply in all his days.

§2

Caillette moistened his lips; he did not know how far he might go—if, indeed, he had not already gone too far. He had no definite knowledge or proof who was the lover of his dead wife, and the father of the child who came not long after his marriage; yet two and two, put together, left small doubt. Bourbon's elder brother, the lad who had died in Italy, had stayed at Belmont, had been seen with the girl, exciting Caillette's jealousy and suspicion, and the ouche had undoubtedly been his. And only a day before her piteous cry to the child: "Poor, poor baby mine, and you are all mine now, for a sennight or so since your father died far away from us, and there is no help for us both but God's help, and Our Lady's"—only a day, or at most a day or two before—news had come from Italy that Louis de Bourbon was dead. If it were true, the child belonged, through his real father, to the noblest blood in France, and if legitimate, might even have come someday to the throne. It went against the grain for Caillette to admit or suggest this. A jest would not serve him; in this grave and splendid presence he could not play innocent, and pretend doubt whether a child born so soon after wedlock (wedlock so abrupt in its making) might not after all be his own. Of course he had been father after his own fashion to a child who had known no real father. He did not want to lose France, even if fortune should turn favourable, and make the boy (as indeed he had become) no longer indispensable. But still less did he want to lose his head, and somehow or other the ouche must be explained to this great Prince of whose dead, elder brother the boy seemed to be love-child.

The Duke took up a small, steel rattle near him, and summoned a page, who was given orders to fetch France Caillette, the King's singing-boy. France was not far away; in less than a minute he was ushered in. The page withdrew, and the three stood in silence—these three of such different fortunes; the Duke whose rank placed him at the right hand of the throne, whose wealth rivalled the revenues of Kingdoms, whose lightest

word was law to thousands of vassals and men-at-arms; the boy, so closely resembling him, in all likelihood his own nephew who, had a few words been muttered a dozen years or so ago—a few documents signed—might have been Duke of Bourbon himself, but had instead been only a little, wandering playing-boy; and —a Fool now without place, in disgrace and jeopardy —Charles Caillette. It was he who broke the silence. "My lord, the boy can tell you no more and nothing different; for all Moulins and La Chantelle I would not lie to your lordship. I have done my poor best to be a good father to him from his babyhood." The Duke was not noticing Papa, but looking very hard at the boy. Caillette felt it safe to give France an almost imperceptible warning wink. After all, it was still possible that his story might serve his interests—and France's interests, which were surely also his own. He babbled out some eulogy of himself, and a lesser one of the lad redounding more or less subtly to his own credit. "Not a bad lad, your lordship, indeed on the whole a very good one, as lads go. I have trained him as carefully and well as a poor, wandering Fool and player might, but it has been very difficult. *Mon Dieu,* how difficult! A motherless bastard, your lordship! Not all would have been so chivalrous—to cover the girl's disgrace, to conceal the rumour of his parentage in the interests of great folk who might be hurt by it, to bring him up, feed him, clothe him, be mother and father and doctor and schoolmaster and employer and almost friend to him. Stomach of a little fish, France, open your mouth (and do not fidget so with your hose, boy) open your mouth instead of standing like a dumb calf, and tell his Excellency all your poor father has gone through for you. A very fretful babe, my lord, and I many and many a time up half the night with him, after a dreary day of work. I have taught him reading, logic, dancing, singing, a thousand good jests and tales. Have I not, France? From me he learnt his Aves and Paternosters and the like. Often enough when there was but one crust left in the sack he had it. 'Twas I taught him temperance, valour, courtesy, good speech. Did I not bring him to Loches,

and under the King's very nose, so to speak, with all respect to it? And now you see him singing-boy in the King's choir, and likely to go higher. Yet I, his poor father——"

France's memories of merciless thrashings, deprivations, kicks, sleepless nights, terrors, starvation, humiliations, neglect, swept over him. Now and then his father had been in good humour and not unkind. But the old life came back in contrast. He had almost escaped from it. He had seen a world which others enjoyed—to which perhaps, in some measure, his real birth entitled him—and knew what he had missed. And here was Papa Caillette singing his self-praises—lies, lies, lies, flowing smoothly from the slack lips—and France perforce giving silent assent. Shame coloured his cheeks.

The Duke turned sharply on the Fool: "Silence, silence; speak only if I order you." He rested his chin, covered with a short dark beard which rasped against his jewelled fingers, on his hands, his elbows pressed the table from which the medley of costly and lovely things had been swept aside. "And now, boy," he said in a voice strangely gentle and kind, so that out of love for him, and admiration springing into the hero-worship of a lad for one who has and has done all that he covets and longs for, France was constrained to speak frankly and truly. Indeed, the Duke said something of truth and courage to speak truth being all-important in the world and the affairs of men; every true gentleman, and to be that one need not boast quarterings, must strive to speak and act it. "And now, boy, let me hear your story, but briefly. I want to know all you remember of your childhood, of your mother, of this ouche which you wore when you first tried to see the King. Tell me."

There was really so little to tell. The gentle and beautiful woman, very young it seemed, who lay sick a-bed. The room he had recognized again at Bléré; the picture of the Swiss Game in which the Princes and Kings figure. . . . The ouche pressed into his hand. . . . Not much more. He was but a very little child then. He had always thought, before these

doubts, that Papa Caillette was his father, and even now could not say anything else. . . . He did not tell of their life together except very briefly in outline, and was glad that the Duke asked him few questions. Though he caught an agitated half-wink from Papa once or twice, he would not say that Papa had been his benefactor, his friend, his protector and teacher, his more than mother and father. These were what the winks invited.

Bourbon turned to Caillette. "It seems you have told me all you know, and not tried to hood-wink me; that is well; I am no hawk for you to hood. I will speak to the King for you. It seems you may make some merriment that pleases him, and he has a greater love for Fools than I, though perforce at Moulins I must keep one. You may go now, and I will say a word for you."

Papa made a clumsy obeisance, and went out, putting on dignity like a cloak as he neared the door. All had gone better than he thought. Once free of the presence, he danced and jogged his way back to the *Salle des Fous,* and, meeting Triboulet, regarded him with his little, pimpled nose cocked haughtily, his slack lips taut for the moment with mystery, his gait important as befitted one soon, no doubt, to be taken into the King's high favour.

§3

France found himself alone with Bourbon, who, with a charming grace and friendliness, put him very soon at his ease. There was a portefolio of paintings on an armoire near the table; the Duke called him closer, and showed him water-colours in this, turning over one after another, and talking easily about them. In much the same way Queen Anne had brought the beautiful books and pictures to thaw his awe and make him chatter. These water-colours were by Bourbon himself, who dabbled in art, music, and letters, though his taste was always above his capacity of execution. About three score of these were in the portefolio, and many of them illustrated popular proverbs with which France was familiar. There was one showing a herd of pigs up-

setting a great basket of lovely flowers; this was headed in very neat and careful writing: "*Margaristas ante Porcas,*" and beneath was written the motto:

"*Belles raisons qui son mal entendues*
Resemblent fleurs à pourceaux estendues."

There was another of a horse being clipped; another showed pigs on a hillside, with the towers and spires of a town in the background. In another picture some peasants were driving a bullock-wagon, with the oxen harnessed behind the wagon; it was labelled: "Placing the cart before the bullocks." France was delighted with them, thinking them wonderful works of art; they were homely, brightly-coloured, drawn with verve if not always exactly, and he could understand the meaning of every one; imagination, also, had given some household word or other a new turn and significance and odd interest. But the boy ventured here and there, seeing the Duke so kind and easy—just like any mortal of common clay—to make a diffident criticism, and Bourbon listened with appreciation to these, commenting on them, sometimes breaking in to say that France was right; he said: "You have not a trained eye, boy, and I am no great artist but a lover of art and beautiful things, who paints only for pleasure, and imperfectly; however, you know good from bad and beauty from ugliness, I see, and I will have you trained." He closed the portefolio, and said: "You sang the other night; a simple song, and very well. Let me hear you. Do you know any more of these songs? The songs the country people sing; but not bad songs, of lascivity and drink. Songs of chivalry, and true love, and the chase, perhaps." He added: "But sing softly, not too loud."

"But, my lord, I have no music to sing to."

"No; you shall make your own by yourself. I will not judge too harshly."

France sang two or three simple ballads and folk-songs, in a low, soft voice as he had been told. Bourbon listened intently, in silence, save that now and then his fingers moved slightly in time; he told France to go on. The songs were very short, very crude and naïve and unpretending—just those a lover might sing, a mother

to her child, a harper in an inn for an interlude; and several were very ancient indeed, so that one remembered the dead men and women who must have known, and sung, and heard them. The simplicity, the melancholy of many, seemed to please Bourbon very much. Under all its gaiety and brightness and glamour the world was always a sad place to him. France had a store of these songs, but by and by he had sung all he knew, and those left were only songs that he did not think the Duke would like. There was silence; then, almost to himself, he began to sing a little song he had made for his amusement when he lay on the grass of the rampart at Loches; the music and the words were all his own; it was all quite artless, natural, as a bird sings because it must on a bright, happy morning in woodlands or over corn or sedge. "That is very quaint, and pleasing, who was its maker? Is it an old song of the people also? I have never heard it," the Duke asked.

"It is—it is nothing at all, my lord," France stammered, "but just what I sing to myself sometimes. I know it is not really music." He was afraid he might be blamed.

"Yes, it is music, but unskilled. And you made it? Have you made others?"

"Oh, I do not think they are really made, sir, not like Master Glareanus makes his great works. I just lie still, and think of things—and sing suddenly almost without knowing it, just as it comes; when I am happy there is one music, and when I am sad another—but I did not know it was really music."

Bourbon rose suddenly, and France thought he was angry. But he said in the same kind voice: "Let me look well at you," and turned France's face towards him so that they looked each into the other's eyes. France had to look up, for the Duke was much taller than he, though he was tall for his years. "It may be," said the Duke almost in a whisper, "it may well be; but poor Louis was very young. . . . I know he was often at Belmont before the wars." He took his seat again at the table, and said: "I know what you have been and are, though there is one thing I am not sure about, and perhaps may never be. What you are to

be and wish to be is the question. What life would you choose, boy, supposing I could help you to it?"

France thought of all the many folk he had met on the roads, in the woods, at the monasteries, in the Court. A jester? A King's Fool? No, no, a hundred times, anything but that. A merchant, perhaps, embarking on great ventures, owning ships, lending money, aiding Kings in their schemes and wars, heading the processions of his Guild, powerful like those Hanse merchants of whom men grumbled that they were wealthier and prouder and more potent than monarchs, though sometimes very obscurely born? No; he did not want to be trader. The *noblesse*, except when they needed their aid, turned up their noses at them. A famous lawyer or judge, then—or a great Churchman who, however base his origin, might become a Prince and the ruler of Princes—yes, might even (splendid and awful thought) be Holy Father. A renowned knight or warrior; well, it was said of one Marshal that he was a poor tailor's son. France would rather like to be a soldier, but did not care to think of killing other men who had done him no harm, or of sacking and burning beautiful cities, or of making a name for setting desolation, misery, pain, where had been ease, plenty, happiness, peace. . . . Yet war was glorious, and he liked banners, drums, tramping feet, plaudits. Oh, he did not know what to say. Should he say he would like to be a great poet, a great painter, a great musician? He stammered out something of all this, and Bourbon laughed.

"Why, love of God, boy, nor I nor any Prince can make a great artist or poet or musician, or even a little one. I cannot make that of myself wish I never so much."

"My lord, I want to be so many things. I think I want to be everything," sighed France, who had never spoken quite like this to anyone before. "While I am alone—and it was just the same when I was a very little boy—I dream and dream; and fancy myself, just for fun, all kinds of things; sometimes an Emperor, perhaps, and sometimes pleading and making wonderful speeches in the courts, and sometimes writing books

and painting pictures that may last when Princes are dead——"

"Well, I will help you to be a little of everything —or most things—and we will see what comes," said the Duke at last kindly. "I have spoken of you already to my good friend the Seigneur of St. Vallier, the gentleman on a dapple horse with housings of azure sprinkled with silver besants, who was with me when Baudemanche brought you to me. You remember that gentleman?"

France remembered quite well the gentleman who had been riding beside, and talking with, the Churchman-poet, Guillaume Crètin. The dapple horse with docked tail and cropped ears—the gentleman's hard, doubtful stare, his raised eyebrows and slightly shrugged shoulders when the Canon of Valenciennes turned and whispered—oh, yes, France remembered him.

"I have spoken to him of you, and he has a mind, at my request, to take you in his service. He is re-organizing his household, and can find, he says, a place for you where you will be taught, and may be of use. You cannot, of course, be a page; your birth hinders; yet you will be something akin to it, perhaps; and in every way you shall have opportunities to prove yourself deserving and able. I shall take an interest myself in you, as much as I am free to do so; it is an opportunity, perhaps, for great and happy things for you." Bourbon waited for a reply; he saw that the boy's eyes had lit up. France hardly knew what to say; he went timidly forward, knelt and kissed the Duke's knee, and mumbled out some broken words of gratitude. Bourbon took up the little steel rattle from the table, and summoned the page. "Ask Monseigneur de St. Vallier to come to me," he said to the lad, who bowed and withdrew. In a few minutes heavy, martial, regular footsteps were heard; St. Vallier entered. He looked every inch a soldier and a great lord, yet somehow Bourbon, quieter, less assertive, held paramount place while they talked. St. Vallier's voice rose now and then above the whisper in which they spoke. France had been told to retire to a small recess, the embrasure of a window, where he

heard scarcely anything; it was some time before they called him. St. Vallier seemed to have been bargaining at the end over some payment. France thought he would like him for master, but was not sure; he was well-dressed, soldierly, handsome, with black hair and close black beard, his face was not unkind or hard; he said a few words to the boy in a brusque but genial tone. . . . Well, the matter would be arranged; and in a week France should go to the château of St. Vallier, where he would make himself useful, and learn many things fitting him for a place in a great household. He again stammered out his thanks, but when he was bidden to withdraw he turned at the exit. "My lords——"

"Well?"

"When I go, will my father be well-placed?" he asked shyly. "I mean—he is really a very good jester, my lords, and you should just hear how he can make the country people laugh if he is only in the humour of it; I have seen men, and old women too, upset a bench before now through laughing so much at him. And I think he will miss me a little, and be angry and hurt too if I have all, and he nothing."

"I am speaking to his Majesty for your father," said Bourbon; "he is to be one of the Kitchen-Fools, and may go before the King now and then, and have his chance like the rest. But the wars do not give much chance to Fools——"

"Except to statesmen," put in St. Vallier, and both laughed.

"And, my lords," went on France, a little emboldened by their good humour and friendliness, "there is my little monkey, Lisette. I do not think I could bear to leave little Lisette. May I take her to St. Vallier?"

"Oh, she may come; my daughters will perhaps be amused with her," replied the Count of St. Vallier, "and"—turning to Bourbon with a smile and an abrupt though deferential bow—"I shall then have my menagerie at St. Vallier as you, my lord, have yours at Moulins."

France went out, smiling himself, and very happy. He was entering a gate of dreams beyond which dreams

might become true and real. Bourbon said to his companion: "The boy does not ask to take his . . . father. It is his little ape he wants. . . . I wish one could know the truth of it all. There can never be certainty, but he is indeed very like."

"Indeed, my lord. And I see no spark at all of likeness to the drunken clown we saw to-night. But Louis was very young, and this girl may have been toy of many lords before her spleen brought her to the Fool's bed; no, there can be guesses only, and no certainty." They went on to speak of Italy and the wars.

CHAPTER XII

"Que voulez vous Diane bonne?
Que vous donne?" MAROT.

§1

SOUTH of Lyons, and not far from Valence, the hamlet of St. Vallier stood and stands where the Rhône and its little tributary, the Galaure, mingle their waters. The ancient castle, of stone with four towers each guarding an angle of the walls, was set high above the huddle of the village; a great gate opened on the descent to this, and another, in the rear of the château, on the Dauphiny countryside. Situated on the Domitian Way, St. Vallier had once been Oisole, "The Little Bear-Town," and Roman legions had made it in old days a halting-place. An Augustinian monastery, dedicated to Saint Valère, which had been united by Pope Urban V to the Abbey of Saint Ruffino in Valence (where the English Pope, Adrian IV, was once a monk) gave St. Vallier its later name. Behind the moat and external walls, and high over the river and the hamlet, the castle itself lay in mystery and seclusion, the scene of ancient tragedies, horrors, loves which chose solitude and darkness for their setting. It had had its splendours, and had still. The Kings of Provence had visited it in their brilliant and romantic day, bringing their troubadours and trouvéres and Courts of Love. Here Hugues III, Count of Burgundy, had gathered his forces before marching them to meet

Philip-Augustus and Richard of England at the opening of the Third Crusade. By rich alliances the Seigneurs of St. Vallier had risen to opulence and power until they treated even the French King as an equal, before the later Kings of France had reduced the ancient nobility to dependence.

Indeed, the St. Valliers could boast now a slight kinship with royalty; a natural daughter of Louis XI, born when he was Dauphin, had married Count Aymar of Poitiers; Aymar, who was still living, but in precarious health, was by his second marriage, with Anne de la Tour, the father of Jehan de St. Vallier, whose service France Caillette was to enter.

§2

It was to this castle France came on a spring day soon after his interview with Bourbon; his new master travelling with a fine escort, and France riding pillion behind an archer on a big Percheron, broad as a barge, so that his legs stuck out almost horizontally. He left Loches in high excitement, yet with some reluctance; at least one little, close friend came with him: Lisette. He had made many acquaintances—and some who were more than mere acquaintances; Alec Maclean, for instance, and him he missed more than anyone else. Alec gave him shrewd Scottish counsel, a mixture of piety and worldly wisdom, urging him to fear God and not to forget to play his cards well; to spend wisely what he had, and always see that he had full value for his money; to strike hard in a quarrel, and say his prayers. Alec played parson to the younger lad with much relish; he enjoyed preaching and a moral. Over some spirits he had brought or received from Scotland—shared out as if more precious than rubies or gold—he advised France to eschew strong drinks, which had brought so many to ruin. Some day, he hoped, France, if he took advantage of this good fortune that had come to him, might reach the highest goal of human ambition; he might, in some small way at least, serve the King in a foreign field; even (who knew, among so many changes and excitements) as a comrade of sorts to Alec Maclean himself. All his Majesty's men-at-arms were, gentle-

men or not, in a sense comrades and brothers. Very solemnly, he told the boy as a guide to his actions in life the requirements of all true knighthood, which the chamberlains whispered in the ears of knights at their inauguration; to be strong in the Faith of Holy Church, to relieve the widow and oppressed maidens, to give everyone his own (and yourself your own too, added Alec with emphasis) to love their sovereign lord the King, and defend him unto their power, and put him always in worship. He taught France also a trick or two or fence, and a few simple remedies and charms. . . . Then Master Glareanus, the little, lively Italian, gave him the score of a chant; and the Queen's Confessor, Father Maheuc, urged him to keep a heart full of charity towards all, men and beasts alike; and some great lords, seeing his fortune, were affable to him, speaking a few encouragements; and besides these were his odd companions in the *Salle des Fous*. He patted the dogs, scratched the polls of the parrots, said farewell to the jesters and falconers and lackeys, but Triboulet only said jeeringly that he was exchanging one *Salle des Fous* for another, which was the *Salle des Fous* called the world. Triboulet was envious of Papa Caillette's promotion and France's luck; he was envious of everyone, and compared Loches and Blois, to their disadvantage, with Madrid, Vienna, Frankfort, Innsbruck, Bruges, and the great cities and capitals held by other monarchs than their own good King Louis, Father of his people, and wearer of homespun worsted stockings.

Papa Caillette slobbered over the boy, impressed on him the obligations he was under to his father's kindnesses and wisdom for his success in life, promised still to keep a fatherly eye on him and advance him as occasion offered—he was himself on a ladder which led to unimaginable heights from which favours could easily be showered—and ended by borrowing a crown for a bottle. And so France saw, for the present, the last of this fair countryside of palaces, rivers, forests, sandy heaths, where the Kings of France had chosen to build their fine homes. Instead of the Loire, the Rhône; instead of Cher and Indre, the little Galaure on which St. Vallier stood; instead of the grim and mighty Don-

jon of Loches, the smaller, half-ruined, yet still massive Donjon of St. Vallier; instead of Blois, Amboise, Chinon, the other palaces and castles of which he heard daily, and two or three of which he had visited with Glareanus and the singing-boys, the little, twisted, squalid streets of a small Dauphiny hamlet nestling under the dominance of the castle. His company were merry enough on their way; there was much store of provision for the road, bells jangled on mules and horses, songs were sung, greetings exchanged, tales told on the halts. The Seigneur of St. Vallier, still in the prime of life, and virtually (though his father lingered on) master of all the fortunes, and enrichments of his ancestors, was a man of many parts, active, agile and vivacious, a good soldier, something of a scholar and even a poet in a small way, very sensitive about his honour, very retentive of all he owned, except where studied lavishness might help his career; an ambitious, capable, loyal servant of King Louis, fond of his books, proud of his family, familiar with the life of camp and court. He had not passed through life without adventure and vicissitude. At seventeen—the story went—he had escaped with his father from a horrible death devised for them by their enemy, Francis of Luxemburg, who knew all the secrets of wizardry, and had secretly cast spells upon them which, if not discovered and circumvented, must have destroyed them without anyone knowing the reason for their end. He had been in the entourage of Madame La Grande, the Regent Anne of Bourbon, where he became the close friend of Bourbon, whom he visited frequently in later years at Moulins and Chantelle. It was Madame La Grande who arranged his marriage with Jeanne de Baftarnay, daughter of Imbert de Baftarnay, Seigneur du Bouchage, when he was a lad of fourteen. The marriage took place at Belmont, in the house of Imbert de Verci, where Papa had once been Fool. In the early Italian campaigns of King Louis the Seigneur de St. Vallier won great distinction, and later in the Milanese. He was in the mid-forties when France first came under his notice, and when at the request of Charles de Bourbon, he took the boy with him to St. Vallier.

§3

Their way carried them along the highway to Italy and the wars—the main road to Milan. Again and again they passed companies of soldiers, mounted or on foot, who had been drawn from the many provinces of Brittany and France. On this route was always much coming and going. Now it would be a courier riding post-haste towards or from the Alps; now a long caravan of wagons, of guns, of re-mount horses with cropped ears and tails; or perhaps a regiment of hardy little brown infantry marching under their officers from some district whose very speech was unintelligible to France Caillette; or perhaps a plumed noble with his vassals following him (but the old, feudal days were going) or cavalry clattering by, or strange engines of war creaking on their long journey, or some company of the Queen's stout Bretons tramping heavily under their accoutrement. And on this highway to the south were other travellers to be seen and wondered at. Wandering merchants with their wares, pilgrims, monks murmuring their prayers as they walked, and inclining their tonsured heads gravely when caps were doffed to them, beggars, mountebanks, poets and minstrels making their way to great houses where verses or a song might win a meal, charlatans selling charms and simples and horoscopes—all these frequented the great highway to the Milanais. In one town they passed they halted to watch a great religious procession with banners, angels with feathered wings of white, of gold, of crimson, of blue, of silver, of mauve, children bearing flowers and singing chants in a weak monotony of voice, raising their flowers by the stalks now and again to emphasize their song, Saracens in flowing robes and mottled turbans, cars of allegorical and sacred figures. . . . Joseph in Eastern garb led an ass on which a beautiful girl represented Our Lady; in his arms a painted, swaddled doll represented the Holy Child. Tiny boys and girls, quaintly garbed, bore the instruments of the Passion; the nails, the hammer, the ladder, the sponge, the lance. Gilded crosses were borne aloft. Petals and leaves were flung

down by children advancing and retiring as the Host drew near under the canopy; with the rest of the onlookers, France knelt while it passed.

How wonderful, how vivid, how brilliant, how wide a world! The old, miserable days of starvation, weariness, thirst, frequent beatings were over—and yet there had been happy days among them too, when he ran free in the woodland paths, or watched the fish and dragon-flies from some bank or river bridge, like that at Bléré—— These days were over and a memory. Already Loches, the *Salle des Fous*, Triboulet, King Louis in his quilted brown and indigo and his grey worsted stockings, the Queen with her Breton Guards and her ladies and the children she taught and mothered (missing so terribly her own) were fading into that ever-pressing, ever-advancing past, which like a sea on sand washed smooth human footsteps and human traces, late or soon. . . . At evening, weary with travel and excitement, he found himself in a quiet backwater of the busy world. Massive walls, weeded moats, drawbridges, portcullis, shut the Castle of St. Vallier even from the hamlet near its gate. Within brooded ancient peace though Europe throbbed under drums of war. France was delighted to find that he had been given a chamber to himself—very tiny, and in a remote corner of the castle, high in one of the four corner towers; but nevertheless his very own, where he could think, work, sing if he chose, and rest, free from molestation. It had two windows, one a mere slit in the grey thickness of the wall, but the other larger, if not very large; an oval window, framing a charming view of a little pleasure garden where trees fresh with the tints of spring cast soft shadows on a soft, cropped lawn. His room was plainly yet well furnished. A crucifix was over his bed; there were some religious pictures—a St. Hubert and the stag, a Madonna and Child, St. Francis preaching to the birds. A slated dove-cote on a stout pole stood in the garden, and white doves cooed an endless crooning song which puzzled him when he woke suddenly. Set in the grass was a little, glassy pond, with a marble dolphin spouting water, and a few fish swimming.

Beyond the garden were the *corps de logis* for maids, linen-women, washer-women and other female domestics, the *basse-cour*, stables and other offices. The little garden was quite detached from the garden proper of the château and stood (as he soon found) between the great well and tennis court, and the small vineyard which supplied grapes and wine for the occupants of the château. France wondered what duties were to be demanded of him, what companions he would have, what lessons were to be learnt. For some time after the world seemed astir he and Lisette, his only and loved little comrade who shared his room, were left to themselves; except for the almost momentary visit of an old crone who brought a light breakfast, and came again, at his request, with a mess for the monkey; she nodded her head perpetually as if it were on wires, but spoke hardly at all, and then only in patois. When Lisette grimaced and tried to fly at her she fled precipitately in alarm, her head wagging furiously. France twiddled his thumbs, looked through the oval window, listened to the cooing of the doves, and wondered what next. Now and then a woman bearing a great osier basket passed from the *corps de logis;* a gardener turned the soil of a flower-bed with a spade—the tread of it on one side only; by and by, as the sun mounted and the day grew warm, an old gentleman was borne into the garden on a kind of litter or great, poled chair, by serving-men in livery; and set down on the lawn near the pond and fountain. He seemed very feeble and old; his long beard, white but flecked with reddish threads, swept his breasts, and his thin hands trembled as he plucked irritably at a coverlet. Out of a paper handed to him by one of the servants he flung bread into the pond, and France's keen eyes saw the flash of gold and silver as the fish hurried to their meal, and leapt to catch it. His keen ears heard the plash, plash, plash of the fountain—very soft and soothing, as the sound mingled with the murmur of trees in a light, warm wind, and with the continuous crooning of the doves. The servants were motioned testily to withdraw, and, as the heat increased, the old gentleman dozed and dreamed near the water's edge.

Later, a boy and two little girls came into the garden, and made reverences to the old gentleman, who said a few words to them, gave them sweetmeats from another paper which had been tucked under the coverture (but the smallest child was made to dip her hand under first and take a sweetmeat for herself, her efforts amusing them all) and after that it seemed as if they were told to go and play elsewhere. France had not much time to wonder who these all were. A man-at-arms with the six silver besants of the St. Valliers on his coat entered suddenly, and told him to brush his hair and clothes, and then follow him.

He was led along the edge of the little garden, past the offices, through the court, and at last to a small room or office near the hall of the château. Here he had to wait several minutes. Voices were heard within; among them, louder and more authoritative than the others, the voice of Monseigneur de St. Vallier, his new master. By and by, caps in hand and very humble, two men who were apparently bailiffs or farm servants came out, with scraps of written parchment in their hands. St. Vallier called him forward.

The room was plainly furnished, and was evidently given up to work connected with the St. Vallier estates. The man whom he was henceforth to serve received him pleasantly and courteously. He was asked a few questions. "Well, I am busy with many affairs," said St. Vallier, "and how you conduct yourself, and how or whether you prosper, lies much with yourself. My good friend and comrade-in-arms, Monseigneur the Duke of Bourbon, has given a good account of you, and it is for you to justify him; I would do much for my friend the Duke, and will help you all I can. And first you shall try to be of use in such small ways as you may; helping my father, the Count, now that he is feeble and sick; keeping an eye to my younger children at their play, and doing errands for my son, the Sieur de St. Vallier, and my eldest daughter. And you shall be taught such things as are needful for you to know in the world; to sit a horse well, and tend it; to play instruments and sing; to learn about books, and pictures, and other matters that interest men of

taste; to use arms in a small way. . . . There are many things you may learn. I am often away from St. Vallier on my affairs, for I have many estates to see to, and those of Dauphiny where our good lord the King "—he doffed his cap reverently—" has honoured me by making me Seneschal; and before long I shall, I hope, be at the wars. But I have given orders to my *Maître-d'-hôtel* to see that you know your tasks, and will bring you in touch with those who have the teaching of you. And now, boy, life opens before you, in a very honourable and noble household, though I say it; and a household very loyal to the King. Honour his Majesty; love God and your country; strive to do your duty in the place where you have been or may be set; these are rules which I, an old soldier, have found bring a lad to honour and success."

A few more words, and France was taken out by the man-at-arms, in the great courtyard he was handed over to another man, grizzled and consequential but perplexed and agitated, who was, it seemed, Romain Maubert, the *Maître-d'hôtel*. Maubert scratched his head and regarded France through screwed-up eyes. "Well, well, well," he grumbled, "so I am to be foster-mother to you, eh? Pretty work for an old soldier who has enough to carry already besides years and scars. 'Tis a fine thing to be indispensable. If there be anything at all wanted at St. Vallier, oh, Maubert can see to it; the old lord wants a bawdekin cushion, it is Maubert who has made it; Mademoiselle Diane's pony has shed a shoe, Maubert will find another; Mademoiselle Louise screams, and Maubert finds the pin that scratches her; Master Guillaume gets his nose bloody, and Maubert must mop it and put on simples, or wants money, and Maubert must find it; always Maubert, Maubert, Maubert. . . . You had better go to the little garden and trim flowers. If Monseigneur the old Count is there still, see he lacks nothing. Supposing any of the young ladies need you, or the young gentleman—who likes ordering folk about for the fun of seeing them run—be at their behest. You come to the hall for dinner, and will be shown your place. This afternoon I suppose lessons; I am to speak

to the Curé about that. Everything falls on my shoulders, and yet men-at-arms have jumped before now when they heard me shouting in the field. Name of God, what a voice I had then! And now I can but coo like a pigeon."

Whatever the old soldier and *Maître-d'hôtel's* voice had been, it was more like the croak of a raven now than the coo of pigeon or dove. But it fell to a respectful murmur as the light clatter of little hoofs on cobbles was heard, and a girl rode into the great courtyard. He left France, and hurried, with some stiffness of the limbs, to receive her. "Oh, Maubert, see that the maids take this package to my room——"

For the first time France Caillette's eyes and those of Diane of Poitiers, Mademoiselle de St. Vallier, met.

CHAPTER XIII DIANE DE POITIERS

"To shape the youthful Squire of horse,
Steady in stirrup and set in his course
The wits of women must help him perforce
Laire, las, laire."

THE SIGN OF REINE PEDAUQUE.

§ 1

THEY looked at one another for a few moments without speech—they, whose lives henceforth were to be linked so closely. There was not one bulging package but several with which Maubert was burdened; with a side-glance at France he went off towards the women's *logis*. Diane was on a small, snow-white Breton palfrey, dainty and beautifully shaped, and harnessed very prettily in silver and pale blue. But France had only the briefest glance for this.

The girl he saw before him, her gaze arrested by more than a mere passing and casual interest, was not yet thirteen years old, though she looked older. France was sure he had never in all his life seen anyone as beautiful. She was exquisitely formed, a model of daintiness and grace; even the most trifling movement presented her as some new and lovely picture set in the frame of the ancient walls. So young and fresh she was, and the background so old, so grey, so mellowed with memories

and years, that she seemed an incarnation and a symbol of vivid, joyous and eternal youth springing among decay and ruin like a flower on age-worn stones. He did not put all this in words to himself, but a scrap of verse under one of the water-colours Bourbon had shown him at Loches flashed across his mind. It was, although France did not know it, a free translation into French of a line or two by a Persian singer, Sadi.

" The alchemist died of grief, and the blockhead found treasure under a ruin."

In a sense among all the great, rich, learned folk with whom fortune was bringing him into touch, France, rarely over-confident about himself, was content to be blockhead—and here among the semi-ruin by the Galaure was treasure-trove of loveliness! Sex coloured the boy's delight hardly at all; he loved grace, shapeliness, perfection, the beautiful, simply because they pleased eyes and senses. This girl sitting her palfrey with such splendid ease had a complexion of clear carnation and snowy white—a whiteness of the skin very rare, showing health in perfection, and having no kinship at all with the pallor of disease or death. Her hair was very dark brown, tinged with chestnut—but indeed, it was not easy to give name to its colour, for with every movement in sun and gentle spring wind it changed marvellously, so that at a moment you would find in it glints of gold, at another it was darkest chestnut, at another darkish brown, another even black with purple hues within the black, like a haze on woodlands. Her mouth was neither large nor small, and at first sight (but she was very young) one might have puzzled whether it were made more for kisses and love and flirtation, or for a sterner dominance of fortunes. The forehead was rather narrow than broad, the lips inclined to thickness, but exquisite in their fashioning. The chin was sharp and strong. Her nose, finely shaped, had the faintest suspicion of tip-tilting—the merest hint of it, giving piquancy and challenge, and the thought also: " Here is one who will not be incurious, will not easily let the good things of life pass her by, will fight for her own." The whole expression was one of quick, bright,

eager intelligence, looking keenly into the future on whose threshold she stood, ready to snatch and hold tenaciously to the end every golden moment of it. She looked, though a child still, self-possessed, assured, balanced and secure and well-poised, perhaps a trifle cold and too ready to calculate on which side of her bread lay the butter and honey—of course one day love might touch her and change this, as dawn flings gold and rose on snow.

But it was the eyes looking into his own that France dreamed of that night, more than all else.

They were long eyes—too long, perhaps, in any other face than hers, for perfect beauty—eyes which, at first sight, seemed glancing from long, narrow slits in a radiant, open, almost-frank countenance; perhaps she narrowed them partly by intention and by trick; she could, on occasion, open them wide enough. But it was the long, narrow eyes which haunted France, boy as he was, child as she was. Their colour, like that of her hair, changed and was doubtful; grey in the main, but varying very much when she allowed emotion to move her. Haunting eyes—and eyes, beyond all else, enigmatic, mysterious, guarding closely their own secrets.

To him, seeing her there in perfect equilibrium on her palfrey, its snowy white answering her snow-white skin, she seemed a rider from some world of faery, exquisite, perfect, of a daintiness untouched and unsoiled by any contact with earth. Diane noticed the impression she had made on this pretty boy before her; she, too, was not altogether indifferent to his own beauty and grace. In spite of all the coming and going, life within the old walls of St. Vallier, in the squalid hamlet under its gate, in the countryside of cringing peasants who tilled her father's lands and grew their crops and vines under the blue shadows of the Vivarais, was not too thrilling for the child. One day followed another without great change or episode. Her father was busy with affairs, kind on the whole, sometimes irascible and coarse of speech, usually occupied and distant; he was often at the Court, at Moulins and Chantelle with the Bourbons, in Normandy where he had many friends among the *noblesse;* and then the wars from time to time

drew him away. The old grandfather, a prodigal and rake in his day, had grown impotent and negligible; he was fretful under his pains and feebleness, and had but one pleasure left, to sit in the sun, and grumble, and think over an active and vivid past before he came to this stagnant backwater of life. He had not much effectual say in anything now. Her brother Guillaume, Sieur de St. Vallier, was a little older than Diane; her sisters Françoise and Louise were younger, the latter little more than a babe. The young Sieur de St. Vallier had a good conceit of himself, visited much at the country houses, loved arms and horsemanship and manly exercises, and had a contempt for girls. Their mother, Jeanne de Baftarnay, had died some little time back; a beautiful, fragile gentlewoman, for years an invalid before she faded altogether out of the world.

Out of narrowed eyes, Diane looked at France; he coloured, knowing that he was being summed up. His dress was passable, but might have been better. He was uncomfortably conscious that his hands were not too clean, and wondered about his neck—true, at Loches even great folk were not always particular about trifles like this, and he had seen King Louis himself (but never the Queen) with greasy hands and mouth after meat; this girl was different; she was clean in dress and person as a new pin, one could have passed a new white hawking glove over the snow-white back of her palfrey and drawn it back unsoiled by a speck, and he felt that the least uncleanness in others did not pass that keen if partially veiled glance unnoticed. He had a point carelessly fastened; she took in even this, and said: "Boy, tie up your point, and then come with me to the stables. Who are you? What is your name?" . . . "*Boy, tie up your point.*" They were her first words to him, her first order; bashful, confused, he obeyed, and answered her questions. Oh, then he was the lad her father had spoken of, who was to be taught at St. Vallier, because Monseigneur de Bourbon had asked it, and was to do little services until he learnt to be of greater use.

He went with her humbly enough; already she was an odd mixture of grown woman, confident and self-assured, and of spoilt, wayward child. The palfrey must

be fed and watered and rubbed down after the ride—she waved aside stable-boys and stable-men (there was a great household at St. Vallier) and would have no hands at work but his and her own. That was not the way; did he know no better? Could he ride? "Not very well, Mademoiselle; you see I was not brought up to do that, except to keep my seat on rough country horses; oh, and we had a donkey once, and I rode him a great deal."

"I ride every morning. I have a beautiful big bay mare besides this palfrey; she is in another stable; I am going to take her some sugar now, and you shall come too. This morning I rode miles and miles into the mountains, and saw such lovely spring flowers. The fields were better than carpets in an Emperor's palace: so many colours there were, and shapes, and some meadows were all silver, and some all gold. Do you like flowers?"

"Yes—and trees too, very much, Mademoiselle," said France. "I think I like trees better even than flowers."

"Well, now you shall come to the great gardens, where there are many flowers and trees; and after that to the little garden, which I like better still, because there are beds in it I tend myself, and plant with the flowers I choose. Sometimes I plant cress and flowers to spell names; Guillaume, Aymar, Jehan, Françoise, Louise. And Diane of course; that is my own name. There is a great 'D' you will see in one of the beds. Diane, you know, was a goddess of the pagans, who were very wicked people, and knew nothing of God, and Our Lord Jesus Christ, and His Blessed Mother, and the Saints. I think they ought to have been burnt at the stake for being infidels, or thrown to the lions as the Christians were—don't you?"

"But if they didn't know——" protested France.

"Well, my Confessor thinks so, and I think so too. I am very religious. But this Diane was a huntress, and so am I. My father has given me a fine bow and arrows, and I have an Iceland falcon all my very own. I like Diane for that—because she was a huntress. I think, too, she was a goddess of the moon, and perhaps once she lived in it; I should love to live in the moon, wouldn't you? It is all so silvery and white and cool; and then you could look down"—her beautiful, mys-

terious eyes had widened a little as she spoke, but again they narrowed, so that only a gleam watched him—" you could look down on the world, by day when nobody can even see the moon, and by night when the moon seems just a lamp for the world to see by, and you could watch everything—kings, and nobles, and common people, and in the woods the brockets and great stags, the little foxes hiding, the hedgehogs and weasels and tiny, tiny birds and insects; everyone and everything you could see without their seeing you; and all they are doing—sleeping, eating, hunting, fighting, stealing, murdering, making love—and yet be away from all, and feel that you could catch the whole world up, and play with it, and own it, with everything in it. Everything. A priest I know thinks the world is just like a ball thrown about the sky." . . .

" Oh, that is nonsense," said France. " But sometimes on the ramparts at Loches, and at Amboise too, I have looked down and seen people and horses like ants, and felt I could pick up anyone or anything I wanted with two fingers. Of course I couldn't ! "

" Oh, *I* could if I tried, France." She talked rubbish and knew it; but she said again: " Oh, I could if I tried. Father Merlin says often that one can move mountains into the sea by thinking one can. I am glad they called me Diane, a goddess's name, even if those horrid pagans did worship her. It would be splendid really to be a god or a goddess, and set people down on the earth, and pick them up as you choose. When I ride out alone in the mountains (they are called the Vivarais, you know) I often think: ' Well, my eyes are very narrow and little, yet they can see the broad sky, and the great heights, and the tall trees, and moon and sun, which are so much bigger, and so far away.' Do you ever think queer things like that, France? Why were you called France? But perhaps it is Francis; that is the Duke of Amboise's name; he plays with me sometimes, at Moulins and Cognac. I will call you France, boy, because I think you are pretty, only your clothes are not pretty; and you may call me Diane, but only sometimes. When the servants are near you must always call me Mademoiselle, or Mademoiselle de St.

Vallier, or I shall be angry, and not answer. You may call Françoise Françoise, and Louise Louise. But do not call my brother, the Sieur de St. Vallier, 'Guillaume'; he will strike you if you do that. . . . Do you like my eyes, France, or do you think they are too long? My brother says so; the other day, when he was angry, he said 'Diane, you look at me like a snake; can't you open your eyes? And you are as cold and sly as a snake.' It angers him more when I look at him like that, and answer quietly, so I do it."

For a few seconds she made France look full into her eyes; it gave him the oddest, uncanniest feeling. Then she laughed, a clear, rippling laugh which somehow reminded him of the gleaning bell, the lark's song, corn and corn stubble in fields stretching widely under wide skies. He said: "I think they are beautiful eyes, Mademoiselle."

"Diane," she corrected.

§2

Diane de Poitiers annexed France just as—not thirteen yet, but with woman already peering over childish shoulders—she seemed to annex, and hold for herself, all that came her way of beauty and worth and value. Her father, sometimes stern with his son and with Françoise, and often irritated if Louise were too much in evidence, spoilt Diane, and denied her nothing. And with others less ready to humour her she had her way. Even her brother, rough under a veneer of gentle breeding kept as a rule for fine company, blustering, inclined to greediness and self-assertion, had to give way to her in the end, however grudgingly. Servants left their most pressing tasks to serve her. The old Count might wait for his litter if Mademoiselle Diane's pony wanted grooming or its drench. The Seigneur de St. Vallier would storm and shout for his boots vainly, while half a dozen lackeys and women were at all points of the compass because Mademoiselle Diane, quietly, imperatively it is true, but without raising her voice any more than when she spoke familiarly of everyday things, had commanded them.

Yet, quietly also, the girl helped and served herself as

diligently. She was amazingly efficient. In the stables, in the great kitchens, in the solar, in the little chamber near the solar which she had made a daytime boudoir for herself, she could do easily, very often, what those trained to service spent pains and time in doing much less well. France had to go with her to the little garden —had to go, but went very willingly. She knew exactly what the old Comte wanted for his comfort, sent the boy on small errands telling him exactly where what was wanted could be found, herself arranged the old man's cushions and pillows to his liking and ease, as no one else seemed able to do. His dim blue eyes looking mistily towards the misty eternities now so near him, lit up with pleasure when she came near. She was so healthy, he so diseased and ill; she so young, and he so old; she so full of life and joy, and he had left to him now only memories, ashes of dead fires, and a world to be interested in at all (and that how faintly) only by proxy. She knew exactly the right thing to do and say. He liked to hear news of a few ancient friends left to him, of the countryside where he had spent his childhood, of any fresh honours won by his family which others thought it wasted time to speak of, to a man whose own life had failed greatly through his follies and extravagances, and whose trembling footsteps led only towards dusty hatchments and the tomb. Now and then, at his wish, she sang him little songs; simple songs, such as he had liked in childhood, sung simply, in a sweet, pure voice. Sometimes France was called upon to amuse him by singing these when Diane was away; sometimes, even, boy and girl sang to him in concert. His thin waxen fingers tapped time feebly on the coverlet.

And then there was the little garden, which Diane loved better than the splendid, spacious gardens beyond the tiny vineyard. France helped her with the flowers; watering from an old, battered green can which had a way of spurting water over themselves when each thought the supply finished and expended; plucking off dead shoots and leaves and petals; trimming borders and hedge; cutting the grass that, after cutting, always smelt so deliciously fresh and cool and sweet. "How *green*

it smells!" Diane said once. "Oh, France, doesn't it all smell green!——"

She rode a great deal, sometimes on the great bay mare. Though it was so big, and she so small and slight when mounted on it, it was always docile with her, and would obey the slightest pressure, the most lightly spoken word; but more often she took the little, white Breton palfrey, especially when she went away for hours and hours into the solitude of the Vivarais mountains; the pony was very sure-footed, but obstinate and headstrong, and needed a firm hand. "Didon," she would say, speaking of the mare, "is like a cow; I do not care for riding cows. But little Baude is all on fire when we ride out into the mountains; we have great fights and quarrels, France, and I have often been thrown off, but get the mastery in the end. I like that."

She was quite happy to go and to be alone. Sometimes, very early, France could see her in the garden among the flowers, fresh as a flower herself; she would see him perhaps, and wave up to him; but if a gardener or servant were there it must always be "Mademoiselle" to her, and sometimes she called him "Boy." Or sometimes he would himself rise very early, just for the pleasure (though he made other excuses) of seeing her on horseback in her habit, perhaps carrying her little bow and arrows with her, or perhaps even with her little white falcon on her white glove, when she was starting for her ride among the valleys and hills. She took bread, fruit in season, cheese, and drink with her; sometimes watered wine, so diluted that the water was only coloured a faint rose or yellow, but as often as not a flask of goat's or cow's milk, or only water in the bottle; the water in the mountain streams was, she said, not good or safe. Her riding dress was very plain and generally of light, pleasant colours; pale green, pale blue, cherry-colour, mauve, lilac.

Now and then, but very rarely, because she was quite fearless, and happy and content by herself, France would be asked, or ordered, to ride with her; he on the big, placid bay. "Of course a man should not ride a mare, France," she told him, "but then you are not quite a man yet, nor even—even quite a gentleman."

This hurt him; but her quick smile and friendly narrowed eyes took away his anger at once, and the sting. "Oh, but you will be both, France; I will see to it," she said, smiling so that her long eyes gleamed under their lashes, and the white, perfect teeth showed like pearl chosen for heavenly gates. On the day she said this, they rode early, and far into the hills, and came back when the sun was near its setting. She criticized his horsemanship very frankly, and he learnt a great deal he had not known. He must not saw the bay's mouth like that; any other steed but tame old Didon would throw him, or bolt with him, or crush his leg against some rock or stone wall. He should take a lock of the mane in his hand when he mounted—as he had to mount slowly, and could not yet vault into the saddle like a squire or knight, who could do so in heavy armour—he must grip tighter, sit more upright in the saddle. *So*—and she showed him how a man should ride. Her long, narrow eyes were quick to see everything; a mountain flower, an insect, a bird, a tiny beast scurrying for safety in the woodlands, the carcass of a goat in a mountain torrent with the foam covering and uncovering it. Everything she saw, and missed nothing at all.

How fresh the spring world! How blue the mountains, and the film upon the woods where the young trees ripened towards summer; how vividly green the young corn; and the twisted olives wore dresses of hoared silver; they seemed the old folk among trees, feeble and deformed.

They clattered through a tiny hamlet now and then, and sometimes Diane drew rein to chat for a minute with some old, wrinkled woman, some old man, some child; but it surprised France that when a beggar held out a dirty palm for alms she shrank from him, and chid him, and would not give him a denier. "He should work," she said, almost with fierceness, "work, or fight, or do something for bread. He is lazy. They have no end of tricks, these people, making sores on themselves, and making themselves foam at the mouth, and pretending not to hear, or see, or speak. And how dirty they are."

"Perhaps he suffered in the wars, though," said France in excuse. It was a flaw on her who was fault-

less, this impatience and lack of charity to the suffering. She said sharply: "Then he is a fool if he has been at the wars. A man at the wars has no need to lack; a good soldier can always make more than his pay, and cut out a fine life for himself; so my father says, and he has done it. I am proud about my father for that; he is a great general and soldier. If the man was unlucky and wounded, or ill, he can at least be clean; water costs nothing. Why shouldn't he wash, and be brave instead of whining?"

Perhaps she had noticed his awkward silence, and the disapproval it implied offended her. For some time she would not speak at all, but spurred up her palfrey, and he had to follow humbly, at a more sober pace, until she chose to let him catch her up. "You do not understand," she said, half in excuse. "We are *noblesse* and gentlefolk, and always have been that, while you——"

"I don't know," said France, "yet maybe I too am really a gentleman's son, and even a Prince's."

"How is that? They tell me your father is but a mean Kitchen-Fool in the King's service, and was less before our friend Monseigneur the Duke noticed him and you. A toss-pot also, ugly and base—— Oh, I cannot bear anything not beautiful. When I was a baby, if a servant, a visitor to St. Vallier, came near to notice me, and was ugly, I would shut my eyes and not look. And I am like that still. Everything round me must be lovely; flowers, books—oh, I will show you my books some day, France—dogs, horses, people; all must be beautiful, or I am troubled and unhappy, and I do not like being unhappy. If I see or touch anything lovely it sends a thrill all through me which I cannot understand at all. When I saw you, France, I felt it; but your hands were dirty, and your point was untied, and the colours and shape of your clothes made me shudder. . . . I will tell you what you must wear to suit you."

They ate their frugal meal, delicious after long hours in the saddle, on a mossy bank at a wood-edge, before a great panorama of mountains, faint blue against the vivid blue of the sky. They washed their hands, bathed their feet, in a tiny brooklet.

This was one day of his new life; when they passed

back, with the sun just sinking like a great gold crown, its light redder and more glorious because nearly spent, the village streets were filled with troops; officers giving hoarse orders, wagons, mounted men and foot, bombards, culverins, dragons, trumpeters, a great negro drummer garishly clad to whom Diane must need speak. They stood together like figures in ebony and ivory. She took France to her little room near the solar under the pretext of his doing some trifling service. It was a very dainty little room, fragrant with sweet-smelling herbs and flowers; there was not much furniture, but what there was had been chosen with exquisite taste. "My father let me have it just as I would, France," she said. "The Sieur de St. Vallier, my brother, laughs at it; his chamber is full of armour and swords and daggers, lures and guns, cadges and jesses for hawks; he keeps hounds in his room, too, and falcons; oh, but they make such a mess and smell."

"Yes, I suppose they do, Diane," said France. "In the *Salle des Fous* it was just the same, with the hounds, and parrots, and apes and monsters; and then there was always fighting and snarling, and Papa as often drunk as not. . . . I am very glad my little monkey Lisette is so much better than the apes in the *Salle des Fous,* but then I have trained her. And she is not *always* good. You saw her once in the garden."

"Yes. I do not like monkeys much; they are like ugly, wrinkled, very old men; sometimes I think God made them to mock at us, just as Bourdichon, the King's painter, will draw grotesque pictures of ladies and men at the Court for others to laugh at and see how foolish they really look. How ugly and foolish most great people, France, would look without any clothes on! But I don't. I look very beautiful. I often look at myself in my mirror when I have got out of my naked bed, and have bathed."

"Papa used to say——" began France. It was a coarse jest of his father's about Adam and Eve that had flashed into France's mind, but he hesitated, and his cheeks were hot. Diane caught him up: "*Papa*—— Oh, but when we met the beggar you said something about your father, and you said perhaps he was a gentle-

man, and even a Prince. Did you mean by enchantment? There are many stories of enchantments in my books, about sleeping Princesses, and ugly animals who are really handsome young Princes, and people turned into were-wolves. I do not believe all I read, of course; though one knows there are witches, and charms, and that were-wolves are all true. There are my books—no, not those; those are solemn sad books that I learn my lessons from. But those others."

She went on, after he had glanced at them—books daintily bound, with a " D " for her name in silver and blue—about this mystery of his real parentage; he told her all he knew; but not very much of Papa Caillette.

" Well, France, I do not think you are really a common boy; I did not when I saw you. And my father said that; and Charles Monsieur said too that you could not be the son of that man you call Papa, but whoever your father was he was not a base man, or common vagabond and Fool. And if your father was really a gentleman 'tis a great thing for you, France. I will believe it if no one else does. And would you not like to be a gentleman yourself? Sit down there, and I will read you something about the way gentlemen are made, and how they conduct themselves, in arms, and at peace in the Court, and in love, and in sport."

§3

So, on an oak bench with scenes of the chase carved in delicate minuteness in the wood, sat France swinging parti-coloured legs (he was proud of his hose and stockings until Diane laughed at them) and Diane herself in a great chair draped in cherry and white. This was the first of several readings from books selected from her little library, itself all her own choice, and the bindings coloured and deviced to please her fancy. She read him legends and fairy tales, stories from the old mythologies, narratives of the wanderings, adventures, battles of ancient heroes, rhymes of troubadours, lays and ballads, till his mind became a crowded and dazzling stage where Ulysses, Jason, Achilles, Ogier, Arthur, the Paladins, the Dauphins, Joan of Arc, Du Guesclin, Ajax, Dido, Saint Louis, a thousand others mingled and

jostled in glittering confusion. One day it would be a few pages from the Grandes Chroniques de France by Paquier Bonhomme, written some forty years or so ago, but still widely read; another from Jehanne de Meung, which she bid him pay heed to, for it was the finest French ever written, and he would learn to speak well and write well by studying him. But first, since he often made mistakes in speech, he must study Despoutère's Grammar.

They went sometimes to the little garden, and there she would read to him, or make him read to her, correcting him and helping him when he stumbled over difficult words; it was all so different from the time when he had spelt out painfully the lettering on church-pictures, monuments and inn-walls, and taught himself all he could from the tattered manuscript jest-book. But at times as her mood changed she would put books aside, and talk to him, or tell him the tales in her own way. "I like you, France; you are a pretty boy, and I like people to look pretty and handsome about me—and you understand more quickly than anyone I ever met. I lose my temper with my brother and the pages, and many great lords whom men think so wise are really very slow and stupid; they say nice things to me about my looks, which I know already, but they do not understand things I understand, and even when I seem very civil and polite to them I am really laughing at them inside. I will teach you and help you as much as I can, and I will get my father to let you have some of your lessons with me. But there are other things you must learn from boys and men, and that, too, you shall do. I can help you a great deal, France, if you help yourself."

She had an uncanny way of moulding men to her will, then as later; wheedling, commanding, worrying, being familiar and near, and being cold and distant; playing every string until she succeeded. It would be a smile sometimes which drew them, and sometimes an icy, clever word, and she was very ingenious and convincing in arguing a case. France found himself, before he had been many days at St. Vallier, seated at a big trestled table piled with books and maps with Diane, Françoise her younger sister, and Father Merlin, the castle-chaplain, who taught her. He was very tall, very

dark, thin as a lath, a young man, and reputed to be clever. Diane said that he had not been long at St. Vallier; before his coming there had been a very fat old priest, with three chins and a vast paunch, and a head looking as if he had mange in it; he shaved rarely, and his chins and fat jowl were always covered with stubbly grey bristles; he dribbled down his soutane disgustingly; it made her sick. Doubtless she played the poor man many tricks before he was dislodged. She told France a few; how she and her brother had conspired once to nail him in his room; how she and her brother had hollowed out an old table to make a cradle for his great belly; how cobbler's wax and pins on his bench had worried him, and treacle poured into the organs he liked to play (but played so badly), and how once Guillaume and she had caught hundreds of mosquitoes in the Galaure Marshes, and set them free around his bed. And once Guillaume had caught some enormous beetles in the woods, and fastened tiny candles to their backs, and, having lit these, had driven the beetles into his room at night, scaring him nearly into fits. He was very superstitious, studied omens, and was horribly afraid of hell and its pains. They worked on these fears. Pictures were always falling when he passed near them, ill-omened birds flew into rooms where he was, inauspicious flowers and herbs were thrust in his way; once they had paid some sous to three cross-eyed villagers to keep passing and re-passing him in the village. . . . He had gone.

Diane rather approved of Father Merlin, with his tall, thin figure, his wild black eyes, his ascetic, clearly-cut face and strong nose. Under him they studied Plato, Boece, Virgil, Cæsar, the Fathers; France reached them by a ladder of dull grammars which irritated him so much that he hurried to climb them and have done with them. This was more than a matter of days; for a long time Greek was Greek to him, and Latin almost as unintelligible as the tongue of Cathay. But he was very alert, very quick, and most willing.

In May, 1511, King Louis started for the war in Italy. On the eighteenth of that month Queen Anne set out for Lyons, meaning to see him there, and say her last good-

byes; he and his Guards and regiments had already gone, and the roads which a day or two before had been a-bristle with steel, ablaze with banderoles and banners, were dreary again, and apathetic, and back in a provincial drabness. On the nineteenth her Majesty followed her husband to St. André, and found him; gave him wifely counsels all along the road to Grenoble, and there said the farewell, not without tears from both. All noble and half ignoble France and Brittany seemed already across the Alps, or wending towards them. Missives had come before this to St. Vallier, and to Bourbon at Moulins and Chantelle, where his strong fortress was, with the gold and crimson cords and tassels signifying that they were orders and greetings from the King; the Seigneur of St. Vallier hastened to go. His boy, Guillaume, Sieur de St. Vallier, travelled with him; he had worried his father to let him go as his page. Most of the men at St. Vallier, at Cotrone, l'Estoile, Sérignan, and the other vast estates of the House of Poitiers which the old Count's follies had already given the mastery of to his more discreet and able son, had marched or were marching away. The château and hamlet were a nest of priests, underlings, women, children and aged men.

France felt humiliated when he saw young Guillaume ride braggingly and confidently to the war, and others in the company who were little more than children; he being left. But there was Diane. He spoke of his grievance; why might he not be soldier too? He could ride as well as the others; better than most. He could send an arrow straighter to the goal than any boy of his age; use a sword, and even a heavy halberd; fence, jump, leap, vault, swim; he had won a prize at the quintain, and there was no game of the pages and lackeys he had not held more than his own in. At Loches he had made quite a name for himself among the other singing-boys at *crosse*—even the haughty, highly-born young pages there would sometimes stand and watch him and applaud him—and at St. Vallier he had done well at *paume*, at the game they called "*À l'Escaigne*," and at other manly and noble exercises. He was better at most things than the young Sieur, who was older than him-

self, and for his birth and influence rather than his merits had been allowed to go. It was not that France wished to kill and wound people; not that; but the King's cause was just, and war glorious in many ways; besides, he wanted to see what was across that icy barrier of which he had heard so often—the rich cities, the strange peoples, the palaces, the famous Duchies and Tyrannies whose names were now household words in France. He wanted to make his own name one day famous and familiar. "*France Caillette.*" . . . It should be the name of someone more than a vagabond jester, son of a drunken Kitchen-Fool in the King's house, or even a rich man's cast-off bastard.

He did not say all this to Diane, but a little, and she understood and soothed him. Some day, perhaps. . . . She flattered his self-esteem, very tactfully. After all, he had not been afraid; she was sure he was as brave as her brother, even if he did not brag and bluster. War was not everything in the world, as Guillaume and many others thought. It was fine, perhaps, and her pulses always stirred to a drum, a trumpet, the beat-beat, left-right-left, of marching men; but it was also very foolish if one thought calmly, and very, very wasteful. Beautiful cities that had taken centuries to build on bare ground were burned, over-flung, trampled down into rubble for weeds and nettles to hide. Corn-fields gave no bread, vineyards no wine. Brave men were turned into mangled and useless bodies. Pictures that artists had worked at lovingly and painfully, putting their most splendid thoughts into shape and colour that, untampered with, might last for centuries, were hacked to pieces in a moment. Horses that had done no harm to anyone had to starve, thirst, be blown to pieces, linger in shrieking agony till death released them. She pitied them most of all. No. War was not all beautiful and glorious.

And did he want to leave her?

She whispered this, smiling at him through her long, shaded eyes under the soft long lashes. It was in the little garden; the old Count dozed in his poled, cushioned chair; only the spring trees and flowers heard.

"France, I didn't want you to go, and perhaps never to come back. France, we are friends, aren't we?"

And, a whisper very low indeed, " I love you." Impulsively she bent and kissed him, and her glorious hair, changing tint so wonderfully with every movement of her shapely head, brushed his face. The little fountain splashed in the pond where goldfish swum, and the feathered waters, tossed aloft, caught now and then the sunbeams in their crystal prisms and domes, splitting them into faint rainbow colours.

France did not speak, did not move; she said impatiently: " Why do you say nothing, France? You are dull and stupid. Oh, it is all dull and lonely and stupid in this dreadful old house; I wish I were a boy like Guillaume, and could go with the men. . . . Joan of Arc did, and led them. No, I won't let you kiss me now; you would not when I wanted," and went away in a pet. He heard her giving an order, in a voice icily cold and haughty, to one of her women who passed just then from the women's *logis*.

CHAPTER XIV MOULINS AND CHANTELLE

" Full glad and joyous then young Tristram grew;
Like as a flowre, whose silken leaves small
Long shut up in the bud from heaven's vew,
At length breakes forth, and brode displays his
smiling hew."

SPENSER.

§1

IN 1513 the old Count of St. Vallier came no longer to the little garden, and hatchments gathering dust over a pompous tomb were all the honours left him. His son, Diane's father, who was already Count in all but name, added " Comte de St. Vallier " to his glittering titles—this very noble Jehan de Poitiers becoming now Comte de St. Vallier, Seigneur de St. Vallier (but Guillaume bore that title henceforth in place of " Sieur ") Marquis de Cotrone, Vicomte de l'Estoile, Baron de Clérieux, Baron de Sérignan, Baron de Corbempré, Baron de Chantemerle, Comte also, although this was in dispute, of the Valentinois, and of Diois. He was Governor of Dauphiny, Knight of St. Michael, a famous General and soldier, a loyal and trusty servant and

adviser of the King. The wars, it is true, had gone unluckily for the French; many were saying that the fortunes and future of the land had never looked so black and ominous. Even to what was now a stagnant backwater of the crowded river of life, came news of victories, checks, reverses, disasters; of wounds and disease and death fallen indifferently upon famous men and obscure men, whose faces were once familiar at St. Vallier. This one, that one, would never come again, or would come changed out of knowledge. Couriers halted there sometimes, white with dust, splashed from head to foot in mud, so stiff and weary with long riding that they could hardly draw cramped legs from the huge leather gambasons when they dismounted for gulped wine and brief rest before continuing their journey; the letters and despatches they carried were often marked "*Hastez tousjours*"—"*Cito, citissime, celerrime*"; so Diane, who missed nothing, told France; they wondered together what the messages might be for the Court, or for the camp. One met broken men now on the roads, with stained bandages, haggard faces, and often lacking limbs; wreckage of war, drifted to the home shores, but useless, who had once been useful in home, field, vineyard, guild. France talked to some of these, but they knew little of the great movements of that vast sea of diplomacy and strife which had drawn them in, and tossed them out worthless; through their words he caught only vignettes—the Pope crossing the ice in his litter; a cavalry charge, an affair of sentries; a victory, and excited, drunken soldiers throwing stones at tents where candles had not been lit to celebrate it; mutinies and their repression; defeats, retreats; barbarities; naked women tossed on horseback and carried away shrieking through the violet nights. Reputations had been made, reputations had been lost. But the French were losing ground; successful and prosperous at home, popular, ruling his people wisely and generously and well, his taxes light and laws humane and just, King Louis's policy abroad and his wild adventures in the Milanais and Naples proved everywhere costly, ineffectual, disastrous. He had, to his own hurt, enfeebled or destroyed the smaller powers which had

been or might have been his safeguard, increased Papal strength by resisting and incensing it, increased the Spanish power which he should have weakened or placated, despoiled Venice to his own hurt; his rule abroad had been established on foundations of sand; his Italian glories were quicksilver glories, shifting and vanishing. He never lived there to establish any personal touch and intimacy with the people. There had been cruelties unforgettable and unforgivable, clemencies misunderstood and fruitless. His medals proclaiming himself King of Naples were but meaningless lumps of metal stamped with resounding but meaningless titles. The Holy League had involved France in new and endless difficulties. Louis's own realm and people, whom he dearly loved, had to pay heavily for all this, and would have paid far more heavily but for the lavishness and energy of his clever, shrewd Brittany wife who poured out her vast revenues to help him, and spared her wit no pains to drag him and his Kingdom out of the scrapes in which a reckless ambition for dominance abroad involved them. It was she who, when the soldiers complained of his frugality that rewarded them so ill, pacified them with gifts. She kept bowls of jewels—diamonds, emeralds, pearls, rubies—from which to send away grateful and loyal and eager some general who came to Loches, or Blois, or the Tournelles disillusioned and disaffected. It was the Queen, a woman still in her thirties, who won over James of Scotland, taking advantage of his quarrel with King Henry of England over Queen Margaret's dowry, and coquetting with the ancient games of chivalry to bind him to her interest; he was to be her knight. And even this alliance was disastrous; Flodden followed that shadow. But Queen Anne never spared herself where the interests of her husband, whom she had grown to love, were at stake.

At St. Vallier, at Moulins, at Chantelle, the life of those left behind passed uneventfully, with little change. Diane went often to Moulins, and now and then to Chantelle, to visit her father's friends, the great Duchess, Anne of Beaujeu, who had once been Regent of France, and Suzanne, the daughter of the Duchess, and wife of the Duke of Bourbon,

Charles Monsieur. At St. Vallier Diane and her little sisters were under the nominal charge of Madame de Rancé, a widow of ripe years, vast experience, ancient lineage, and not the least capacity for control; faded, angular, precise, ineffectual, devout, vain, and kind. A hundred times a day she declared that she could do nothing at all with Diane, yet never tired of imparting in and out of season pious maxims, the punctilios of an etiquette already out of fashion when Louis XI was on the throne, and solemn warnings about the goal towards which modern young womanhood was wending. Diane, who liked her, laughed good-humouredly, retorted about her chaperon's weak fondness for paint, patches, solitary games of cards, and certain peculiar and lesser known saints—and went her own way.

But now and then Diane, impatient of monotony and chafing under even the mild efforts at rule of Madame de Rancé, announced a sudden decision to visit Madame La Grande and the young Duchess, which would always plunge her guardian-lady into vapours and agitation. Madame de Rancé was not a little frightened of that kind, austere, very sage and very great lady who, having once ruled France, now lived on in a tranquil, gracious and opulent retirement at Moulins and Chantelle. Madame La Grande, the daughter of Louis XI, and inheritor of his great abilities though not his notorious vices—one could permit her a few harmless superstitions—had a tongue which, if not sharp, was direct and out-spoken; she did not conceal her likes and dislikes; and was too accustomed to power to refrain from exercising it still in lesser ways. It was Anne de Beaujeu who had arranged Jehan de Poitiers' marriage, when he was fourteen, with Jeanne de Baftarnay; Imbert de Baftarnay, with La Tremoille, had won her unswerving friendship by aiding her against Louis when he was Duke of Orleans, and by helping her to keep the English out of France, and she was not one to forget a service. She interested herself in Jehan's children, and for Diane had an affection, which the girl, in less measure, returned; or certainly appeared to return. Madame de Rancé, in hysterical moods, would sometimes hint that her charge's affection

was not entirely unalloyed by self-interest, and reproach her with the deference she paid to Madame La Grande when she refused submission to rules and regulations made by her chaperon at St. Vallier and, indeed, laughed at them. Madame de Rancé, a good-hearted if foolish woman, was jealous of the greater lady's influence over the girl, and her dislike had not been diminished by some very frank comments on her appearance made by Madame, and, either deliberately or in an unguarded moment, reported by Diane. A visit to the Bourbon palaces was always dreaded by Madame de Rancé; she went reluctantly, returned delightedly, in twitters of nervous agitation.

§2

France Caillette missed Diane terribly whenever she went away, and did not understand why he missed her so badly. She was often cold with him; often haughty and distant; and had queer moods when, after being affectionate and even humbly loving for days together, she would change suddenly, criticize him in a hundred trifling matters of speech and bearing and behaviour, making him red and angry and deeply hurting him—refusing to let him ride with her, play with her, or sit over books at the same table when Father Merlin came. Her moods puzzled him. After a spell of sulky aloofness and hauteur, she would return to the old way without apology or explanation, though once she came with a flower (it was a white rose-bud, with the blanched, fresh whiteness of her own skin, the firm, pure strength of her own flesh) and said: "France, forgive me; we are friends, aren't we? And always; for always. I shall never be fond of anyone again as I am of you." Then she would perhaps fondle Lisette, give the monkey nuts or sweetmeats; be pleasant in a hundred pretty ways, to please France. But with Diane he was always puzzled, always on a see-saw of moods, always on ground where flowers of mountain purity and whiteness, soft as wool, clothed volcanic earth.

Once he went to Moulins with her; the great Duchess had heard of the boy, and wished to hear him sing. The Duke of Bourbon was still in Italy, but Duchess Suzanne

was with her mother. Suzanne, not yet twenty, though so long a time married (very happily) to the Duke, had been for a time at the Court, as Lady-in-Waiting to Queen Anne of Brittany, where for her mother and husband's sake she was treated with much respect. Though they had once been enemies King Louis and the ex-Regent were too magnanimous for grudges, but Madame La Grande went little to Court, liking better her own and her son-in-law's at Moulins, Chantelle, and their other palaces and fortresses; the Bourbons were almost as wealthy as the King himself, and kept great state. Madame de Rancé made, as usual, desperate efforts to avoid this visit; she liked her own bed at night, hated jolting over rough country lanes in a stuffy litter without conveniences, very likely with fleas in taffety and cushions, and discordant mule-bells jangling away sleep; and she certainly had no wish to make her obeisances to Madame. An old cat, thinking far too much of herself—a match-maker also, and of all women in this world Madame de Rancé could not abide a match-maker. . . . She remembered Diane's father going reluctant to his wedding; a very pretty boy he was, with his curled, dark hair, and in his fine suit, and the plume in his bonnet fastened with a jewel which had belonged to Marie of France, whose marriage to Aymar de Poitiers had made Jehan's father the brother-in-law of Madame. . . . If, that is, the husband of a royal bastard could be properly the brother-in-law of a true Daughter of France. . . . She had engineered the marriage of Charles de Montpensier to her daughter, Suzanne, and had sent plate to their wedding. Very likely she (having a stealthy finger in most pies) had something to do with the betrothal of Francis of Angoulême, that spoilt and madcap boy, to plump little Madame Claude, which she knew, on good authority, was arranged secretly while Queen Anne was away in Brittany. Certainly it was Madame La Grande who had been responsible for that most unhappy marriage, the marriage of Louise of Savoy, her ward and protégée, and the Count of Angoulême. No girl or boy was safe with her.

Diane asked slyly whether Madame de Rancé feared she might not be safe herself. As for Diane, she had no

objection to a splendid match if the Duchess chose to recommend it; it saved so much trouble to have one's husband chosen by other people. In a contest of tongues Diane had once riposted on Madame de Rancé with a hint that she had not been indifferent to the "very pretty boy, with dark, curled hair," whom, grown into manhood, and handsome in his soldierly, bullet-headed way, she now served with humble alacrity. Poor Madame de Rancé's own marriage had not been happy, though she had managed it herself.

After an acrimonious outburst Madame de Rancé was swiftly penitent; she was too good-hearted to be really malicious, but, no, she did not like match-makers, did not like Madame La Grande, and was never comfortable or happy at Moulins.

It was not easy, France thought, to be unhappy there; he had never been in any place so wonderful, so magnificent, and, withal, so easy and homely in all his life. Amboise, Blois, Loches, could not compare with it. The grounds ran down to the banks of the Allier; they were very beautiful and diversified, and one could wander at will for hours through groves, by fountains and statues, through gardens and park-lands, through chases and woods. The Duke of Bourbon had a love for everything beautiful, costly and rare; he had made this vast Palace a treasure-house where the wonders of the world were assembled for the enjoyment of his household and his guests. At enormous expense trees foreign to the soil of France had been transported hither, to delight the eye by their strange foliage, their vivid colouring, their curious shaping, their height and girth —there were dwarf trees also from Japan, perfectly proportioned, which might have grown in the garden of a child's puppet-house. Plants under glass shivered when you touched them, and plants caught insects, and plants took away the senses if you were too long near them. And then there were rare birds, rare beasts, rare fish, brought from far lands. Some, being fierce and untamed, were shut in iron cages; those that were harmless and innocent roamed at large on the lawns and river-banks. In the garden walks one met spotted and speckled deer like none that France Caillette had ever

seen in the home forests; peacocks, golden pheasants, Indian turkeys, water-fowl of unknown species, parrots, tropical and semi-tropical birds of every colour of the rainbow. Herons fished with their sharp bills among the river sedges. Once the boy met a strange creature which must, he thought, be a chimaera; it had the rump and tail of a horse, the head of a deer—or was it more like an ox?—a bristle of hair on neck and muzzle; a medley of beasts in one. Another day a beautiful, sleek, hunting cheetah padded past him; and soon after an animal striped something like a tiger, but shaped like an ass. There were monkeys chattering in the trees; he had not brought Lisette with him, and wondered how she would have consorted with this company.

In spite of the war, a regiment of men and boys still attended to the gardens and animals; it was amazing how great a household had been left here at Moulins. Only princely revenues could have supported a home so princely. Everywhere, also, the gardens and grounds had been arranged with the greatest taste and care; paths led to enchanting views, small pavilions and summer-houses were placed just where they afforded the most pleasing rest and prospect.

The Palace was magnificent, and yet unobtrusively so; there was nothing garish, crowded, cheaply gaudy, flamboyant; here also all was in excellent taste; it was a home as well as Palace, but the home, evidently, of people of refinement and culture and high rank, who had no need to make a display of wealth, or to compete with rivals. France liked Moulins very much indeed.

§3

And, in spite of poor Madame de Rancé, he liked that great, sage, austere and yet kindly lady who ruled it; Anne of France and of Beaujeu, Duchess-Dowager of Bourbon, daughter of King Louis XI, and once Regent of the realm. It was strange indeed to think that this elderly, quiet lady, with sad, keen eyes, who said her own mind quite bluntly and directly, though her manner somehow hinted at a wide tolerance and genuine kindliness and goodwill, had once signed treaties, commanded armies, launched great ships, been master even of the

man who was now himself master and King of France. She had been splendid once. Her magnificence when her will was law in the land had not been forgotten. After the betrothal of her daughter, when the contracts were drawn up by the Cardinal of Amboise, Princes of the blood, grandees, bishops, and magistrates, a legend had stayed in the countryside about her dazzling apparel, her more than regal bearing. "Solomon's wives in all their glory were not arrayed like Madame," a jester of the Court had said. She wore a green satin robe, a bodice loaded with diamonds of priceless value, with rubies and great pearls. The sleeves were very tight, and slashed to show the white chemise beneath, tied with grey silk ribbons. Her throat was bare, except for a necklace of large pearls among which was one enormous ruby. On her head she wore a velvet cap with an aigrette of feathers fastened with a clasp of two rubies, a diamond, and a pear-shaped pearl. . . .

And now France saw before him an old lady in hood and coif which, enclosing a face seamed and wrinkled, it is true, and having something of the parchment look of a forgotten face in some old picture—yet placidly beautiful—reminded him just a little of a picture he had seen once of Our Lady in age. She had a trimmed plain coat of some dark material, the neck was cut low, but on it was a strand of small pearls. A strong face, the strong and prominent nose its most notable feature; a face kindly, sad, tranquil, yet not altogether forgetful of old glories and old, dominant years.

This was Madame La Grande, who, Regent of France once, was Regent now, during Bourbon's absence, of his rich but lesser realm.

Around her, when he was ushered in, were seated a score or so of girls, some quite young, many of them of rare beauty, and richly though not extravagantly dressed. They sat on cushions, and France was amazed to see Diane among them. She gave him a look which was all enigma, and yet one in which were to see demureness, and lurking in the corners of the very long eyes, and about the very sweet carnation lips, amusement. It was Diane who had coached him how he must conduct himself. Madame's Court at Moulins had rules

peculiar to itself, and was governed with decision and with firmness, but wisely, and very kindly. He must go down on one knee when he entered. Indeed, it was the strange law here that all lads and young men, in speaking even to a girl of their own class, and even of their own age, must speak while on one knee, in homage. And then there were matters on which, if the Duchess spoke to him of them, he would find it useful to know her mind. She loved the old ways, the old days, and had small patience with the new. If she spoke of verse—as was very likely, since France might not only be called upon to sing, but to recite some of the simple verses he had made—he must remember her preferences and strong distastes. Now Queen Anne of Brittany, Diane said, was very fond of poetry but showed little discrimination between good and bad; but Madame knew what was good, and liked the old clear and simple style; and could not stomach the grotesque rhymes and sounds that had lately disfigured French poetry. . . . Neither could France himself.

Diane laughed a good deal over the Breton Queen's patronage of certain extremely self-important but indifferent poets at the Court. Dressed in black, and wearing enormous black shoes, on certain days these were called before her, where they went down on their knees and waited while she reflected over some subject suitable for a panegyric. This might be religious, or moral, or purely fantasy. She criticized also their ballads and rondeaux—awarding prizes to those which pleased her. At dinner time, or in the evening between spells of work with her ladies and the girls she instructed in cross-stitch, satin-stitch, chain-stitch, tapestry-stitch, and other needlework, her Secretary read in a high, clear voice romances, histories, legends of the saints, and—poetry. Now and then doctors and savants were brought in to diversify a programme by disputing before her, the Queen sometimes taking part, and awarding the palm to those who pleased her best. It was all very droll, because, with the best intentions in the world, the Queen really knew little of such matters; though, to be sure, she could tell a good picture from a bad. There was a new Fool at Loches or Blois (Diane said) named

Triboulet or some such thing—"Tribulation" it meant, but was not his real name—who had got into hot water because he was heard imitating, very cleverly to be sure, one of Queen Anne of Brittany's famous evenings, taking off poets, doctors, savants, to the very life, and even her good Majesty herself.

Madame La Grande, great in rank and title, and altogether great (but so in her different fashion was Queen Anne) had a purer taste; the boy's performance, planned beforehand with Diane's help and counsel, pleased her. She said a few kind, wise words to him, and asked him questions. Monseigneur the Duke had mentioned him before he went away, and she was glad he had profited so well in the household of her good friend Monseigneur de St. Vallier. Diane, whom she loved very much (and she smiled towards Diane, who composed her face to a sudden forced gravity) had also told her a good deal of him; how well and painfully he had studied, how quick he was, how admirably he could ride a mettled horse, and engage in manly exercises; there was one thing he must still learn, and that her good old friend and acquaintance the *Maître-d'hôtel* at St. Vallier, Romain Maubert, would teach him. Maubert had served in the earlier Italian wars gallantly, and in the still earlier war, now happily forgotten (she meant the "*guerre folle,*" when she and the Duke of Orleans, now King, were at strife; the foolish war, all others, perhaps, being wise). He had been *Maître-d'armes* before he was made *Maître-d'hôtel,* when his many wounds made him unfit for active service; but he could still teach the tricks of fence as well as any man in France. Thrust, lunge, parry, riposte—nothing the sword could do Romain Maubert did not know. France must learn. Every gentleman should know these. . . . She stopped abruptly, reflecting suddenly on a word unhappily used; and went on: "A man may be a gentleman who is not born to it, a Knight who has had no chance to serve his pageship." She paused again, and said: "Jesus Christ was born in a manger, and folk talked of the manner of his birth; yet Jesus Christ was the greatest gentleman who lived, and the perfect Knight, whom all good Knights must essay to follow."

She dismissed him with a gift; he was to amuse himself as he pleased at Moulins, until Madame de Rancé and Diane returned. And, because he liked verses and books, and made quite good songs and verses (though he had still much to learn) Monsieur de Marillac, the Duke's Secretary, who was now at Moulins working in the library, would take charge of him, and find him bed room. He caught Diane's eyes, narrowed and gleaming and friendly, as he went out. "Did I not speak up well for you, France?" they said. "I can really help those I choose, can I not?" But the lips were not parted, and had lost even the demure, slightly quizzical half smile which had greeted him at first. They were grave.

Monsieur de Marillac, a grey-haired, grey-bearded man, a scholar round with much poring over volumes, and none too careful of dress, ruffled his already ruffled hair when France was brought to him, stooped nervously to tie a hose-point, and let slip a stocking down a thin white leg. He was impatient of disturbance. But he and the boy went through the great library together—the pride of Moulins and of learned France—and he chatted pleasantly if gruffly over the precious tomes; their illuminations; their tooled and gemmed and gilded bindings with the armorial bearings of the House of Bourbon and great Houses with which it was allied; their painful scribes'-work, crude wood-cuts, maps where ships, dolphins, mermaids, palms, savages, lions, unicorns, pelicans, elephants and camels figured. Some copyists were at work in the bays and carrels of the great room; an old Dominican in black and white, with a black skull-cap over tonsure and crisp iron-grey curls, peered at tiny manuscript through a thick glass set in a frame of yellow latten; there were young lads also, some surely not older than France himself. He watched out of the corner of an eye one boy, set to fill in the details of a copied map. The lad worked with the tip of a pink tongue between his lips; he was very much in earnest, and had no eyes for onlookers. Over the library brooded a great peace, a peace one found nowhere, thought France, in all the world but here; not in the country, where birds sang, cocks crew from farmsteads, sheep bleated, hunting horns rang in the woods; not any-

where at all, unless in a musty, ancient church; and even there came pattering feet, and the mutter, often, of Mass and privy prayer, and click-click of beads. In the library at Moulins not a sound was heard, not a sound permitted, but the lowest whisper, the inevitable rustle of leaves.

So the Secretary and France whispered, and went into the open air together, where they could speak openly and freely. It did not matter what the huge Mal Coiffée tower or the turrets and spires and battlemented walls and offices overheard; but folk and books in libraries may only whisper. France was at once elated, very happy—and profoundly depressed. All these books holding such stores of knowledge filled him with a sense of futility; one could never, surely, read and master them all, and others were always being written, so that it was impossible to catch up in any case; one might live two hundred years and not know much even then. Besides, most of the writers were dead, and the scribes and illuminators dead, who had taken such pride in their work once, and hoped such great things from it; but now. . . . He thought nevertheless that he would love most dearly to live, of all places in the world, in the brooding peace of Moulins Library, among its books.

But he wished Diane could be with him there always, so that they could whisper together, and look at lovely things together (books and pictures and quiet being her delight also) and make together beautiful and lasting treasures for others to wonder over. Of course Diane would not always be contented with this, as he was sure he himself would be. She would want her long morning ride in the fresh air, early sun, mist, rain; she would want now and then to mingle with great people, and be admired; she would want the excitement and company of the hunt. But that she could have in the great park, stretching ever so far from the Allier and along its bank, where there were boars, and stags, and wolves. How happy they might both be at Moulins.

§4

The Duchess in her earlier life had loved the chase, but after her own fashion; now she hunted rarely. In sport as in all else she was tenacious of the old customs

and rules which a modern world ignored. She thought it as disgraceful for a gentleman to use firearms in the chase as to ride in a litter or carriage, and was meticulous about details of costume, especially where women were concerned. Certain new modes perturbed and irritated her. She was accustomed to supervise everything even to the minutest detail, before a hunt, interviewing her Grand Veneur, her Master of the Toils, her Master of the Hounds—a string of green-clad officials of lesser rank waited humbly to report, and to receive instructions. She had not, even now, with advancing age, lost all interest, though she could no longer follow the hounds, except perhaps at the awkward distance necessitated by chariot or litter, which could not travel far from roads or forest rides. But she saw to it that her guests suffered no lack of good sport. Several times while he was at Moulins France saw the meet on the great terrace before the Château, after the brief hunting-Mass, and the Duchess smilingly watching the departure, and speaking a gracious word now and then, or patting the leaping hounds. The coupled dogs of many breeds and qualities—lean, sleek, swift greyhounds, some of a famous Spanish breed, some white, from historic kennels in France; Breton spaniels; bloodhounds; boar-hounds, hunting dogs from England, from Italy; the piqueurs and falconers, the green habits (but among them also red and grey) of huntsmen, the ladies on hackneys harnessed and caparisoned in rich velvet, the plumed bonnets and caps, the jewelled clasps glittering in sunshine, the red hunting-boots of damascene leather—all this the prettiest sight in the world, however ill-omened for beasts and birds free and happy, and unsuspecting, in their forest haunts.

Below the great Palace, standing like a fortress on its heights above the park, were the new Italian gardens, beyond these were terraces where rare plants were grown and tended by horticulturists specially brought from Milan; then came the reservation for menageries and aviaries, and, farther away still, enclosures where wild birds were preserved for the chase — partridges, pheasants, francolins, and many more, common or little known. France was free to wander almost where he

chose. He saw Diane rarely—and then, as a rule, the strict and curious etiquette of Moulins made their meeting absurdly stiff and formal; they could not speak on familiar terms as at St. Vallier, where life had been so jolly and free. But the girl was happy enough. She was far in advance of her years, and consorted rather with girls older than herself; nearly always with girls of high rank. She professed a great affection for Suzanne, the Duke's young wife, and Madame's daughter; they were often together. There was not much to explain this close friendship; Suzanne was some years older than Diane, she was pale and thin, and slightly lame; very gentle and amiable, but without much originality or strength of character; she was no beauty, though her fair, soft hair, the sweetness of her expression, and her blue eyes which had always a faint wistfulness in them gave her, perhaps, some slender claim to prettiness. She could not breathe through her nose, and spoke rather thickly and indistinctly. Someone said once in France's hearing, seeing the young girl and the young wife together, that Mademoiselle de St. Vallier knew already how to select a foil; she chose her friends as she chose her clothes, and knew the use of contrast. And then Diane hunted as much as ever she was permitted to do, riding to perfection a fine, spirited horse from the Moulins stables. From afar France saw her among all that glittering crowd, but he might not go too near. Once her horse, when the horns sounded, turned very restive and the girl's slight wrists seemed not strong enough to master it; France ran forward, but a gentleman on a tall, powerful black flung angry words to him to go back, threatened him with his switch, and spurred to Diane's help. She managed with great skill and effort to control the horse herself. Giving gracious and courtly thanks to the cavalier, the girl flung a glance at France saying: "Thank you, France," which sent an odd little thrill through him; perhaps no one noticed but he. And yet there was something else he could not understand in this glance through the half-veiled eyes. . . . The gentleman who had blustered at him was elderly, ugly, and seemed almost a hunchback, though he sat his horse very well.

Nevertheless France met Diane now and then on almost the old terms. Once she was riding, very early in the morning, by herself; she said she was going to Chantelle for the Duchess, and would not be back for many hours. She wished France might go with her, but Madame would not approve. Chantelle was a few miles from Moulins, and was one of the favourite homes of the Duchess. Unlike the furniture in the palaces of most of the Princes and nobility, that at the Bourbon palaces was never carried about with the household when it travelled, but each of their seats had its own. If a great family went away to "sweeten"—to permit a house long lived in to become habitable and clean while the household stayed elsewhere—most of the furnishings went also. The Duchess, and Bourbon when he was at home, took only necessary mails, huches, bahuts; the last two serving both as packing-cases and for use in the rooms. Chantelle was situated on a rocky precipice, and was one of the strongest fortresses, if not the strongest, in the country. It was also one of the most beautiful palaces in France, and was full of treasures—books, tapestries, pictures, statues.

Sometimes France found Diane in the library, where they would look over books together, and whisper; but both had to be quiet as mice. Still, he did not have to go down on one knee to her there. The young nobles at Moulins (but the best were at the wars now) seemed to like doing this homage; France did not. These fine young gentlemen puzzled France a good deal, and irritated him by their absurd manners, some of which, being of a very new school, the Duchess herself would not have commended. They pursed out the lips when they walked about, as if they were trying to whistle; they made queer play with their eyes, and had an exact code of greeting acquaintances according to rank; they danced on their toes as they walked. Diane laughed at them too; she said they walked like hens on hot tiles, and she had no patience with their scents and curled hair and fringes and affected speech. It was the craze to purse up the lips as in kissing when speaking to a lady. But these were, some of them, friends of the young Duke of Amboise, heir to the throne, and perhaps followed his example.

Now and again, in the evenings, after the heat of the day, Diane and France would meet, and be just boy and girl again as at St. Vallier. She threw off her stiffness in these snatched moments free from the rigid etiquette and precision which were the only drawbacks to life at Moulins—if they were indeed drawbacks; they certainly gave a dignity, a rich simplicity, a grave and slightly austere value to the life of those within its atmosphere. They walked one evening at dusk by the reedy banks of the Allier (which the peasants called the " Ayer ") taking a little, lonely path on the other side of which, secure within fences and wire, were mews for some of the hawks; here were kept gerfalcons from North Germany, falcons from Tunis and Norway and Iceland, goshawks from Armenia, Persia, Greece, and Africa. Diane knew a great deal about hawking, which she loved. The boy himself could never repress a certain pity for the small creatures of the air who were torn to please and amuse the falconers, and he said so; she would always have him say exactly what was in his mind. " Oh, but 'tis the way of the world, France. God made the hawks, and taught them how to hover and strike; they would do it anyhow. The lesser birds are made happy by us while they live, and they are no worse than we, who always have death hovering over *us*, ready to strike. Life is hard with us; we must harden ourselves to life." It troubled him that the girl, who was but a child in years, should speak like this, but he felt somehow that she was making out a case about the right of which she was not certain. For some minutes she walked on without speaking. " God gives all some weapons," she said at last, " the birds have their chance. I have seen a heron pierce a hawk in the air with its sharp bill; when they fell to the earth, the hawk was transfixed, and dying. Little birds have wings and sharp eyes, and their smallness." Later she said: " I have my own weapons, which I shall use when I am older." They came to a garden by the riverside on their return. A fountain played in it; there was an aviary set under blossomed trees; by the water's edge a kind of traverse had been made—a sheltered latticed seat, where two could sit, quiet and secluded, and make love after the

old fashion if they chose, unhampered by rigid etiquettes; and unobserved. Two peasants in the pleated caps, blue and grey striped dress and red, yellow and blue aprons of that countryside were working here, but they went away. This garden was in the wilder part of the park, and had been made long before the new Italian gardens and the new terraces. They sat together.

In the aviary were many small birds of varied and vivid plumage; parroquets, canaries, some white pigeons, humming birds small as a little finger nail, and flashing like gems, several love-birds. Masses of foliage, and bare branches of small trees, with many twigs, and perches of alder and willow, and boxes for their shelter and food and drink, were in the cages; they were well cared for. For a time France and Diane watched the antics of some love-birds; these pressed bills together, with a gentle clittering noise, but then one would become too violent or perhaps angry; it was hard to tell whether they made love or fought; there was much soft pushing, and one took to flight, to return very soon.

It was pleasant to watch this, with the cool evening wind coming from the river after the hot day, and the soft ripple and gurgle of water among the reeds, and the sun giving its blushing good night to the world as it nestled down into its bed of sky.

CHAPTER XV THE GENTLEMAN ON THE BLACK HORSE

*Robin: "Douche baisselete,**
Donnés le moi, votre capelet,†
Donnés le moi, votre capelet."
Marion: "Volontiers, mes dous amiet."

"ROBIN ET MARION," ADAM LE BOSSU, 13TH CENTURY.

§1

DIANE said suddenly, and very softly: "France, I do not always mean all I say; but when life puzzles me, I think 'well, it is only by being a little hard, and cold perhaps, one can master it.' It

* Douche baisselete—sweet girl.
† Capelet—'chapelet': flower crown.

is so strange to think we all must fight, and dodge, and scheme, and do things to keep us healthy and strong, so that death does not get us—and yet in the end he *does* get us. And getting old and ugly is worse than death, but how can we keep age and ugliness away? I have thought very much about that, and sometimes I have clenched my fists—like this—and have said, again and again: 'I will *not* grow ugly and old; never, never; and you, Time, shall not make me; and even you, Death, though you must win at last, shall not make me ugly for men to see.' I knew an officer, an old friend of my father's, and a noble, who always carried with him kerchiefs to the wars, white, and large, and of purest silk, and whenever he went into battle his squire had to provide one; neither the squire nor anyone else knew why, because it was never used. But one day he was slain in combat, and was found with a kerchief over his face, which was distorted with pain; his last strength had put it there, so that he should not be seen ugly till the very finish of it all. . . . Look, the sun is dying—there, it is gone and dead, and now how flat and dull the river looks, and all the beautiful colours of earth are dying now——"

France had never seen her in quite this mood; he wanted to say something, that the sun was very old, yet always beautiful; that it and all the colours came back; that the moon, cold, of purest silver and palest shadows, was even more beautiful than the sun, and was old too. He nearly said: "Diane, you talk as if you were as old as the moon." He tried to frame a little, courtly, friendly speech. The moon was the emblem of Diana, the Dorian goddess, the huntress, the chaste, the—yes, the cruel too, but he could not say it. Diana, slayer and healer both; daughter of Latone, sister of Phœbus, lover of the sleeping Endymion, pursuer and punisher of Actæon, killer of Callisto; giver of balsams and healing herbs, the very good, the very lovely goddess of old Athens. An enigma, a mystery. . . . He had, in an idle hour at the library, chanced on references to Diana in ancient classic writers. But he said, quite lamely: "Oh, of course we all must die one day, Diane; but

not for many years I hope; and I have heard that the way to grow old and ugly before one's time is to think too much of such things."

She said: "France, a Norman gentleman was telling me a tale the other day, a legend of Menoir d'Argouges, in Normandy. Robert, the Baron d'Argouges, was hunting one day when he met twenty lovely ladies riding on milk-white horses; one lady was Queen of the others, and he fell straightway in love with her. They rode together towards his castle, and she told him that she was a very potent fairy who had for long past watched over him and been his special protectress; it was she, not long back, who, by her enchantments and because of love for him, had given him victory over a great dragon which had him at its mercy, and had enabled him to slay it. He asked her forthwith to marry him, and she assented, but on one condition; he must promise never to mention one word in her hearing—the word was *Death*. Willingly he agreed to this, and they lived most happily; she was a model of all virtues, and he a good and loving lord to her, and most successful in all his enterprises; to these lovers several children were born, all as beautiful as angels. But one day there was a great tournament at Bayeux, near which the Menoir d'Argouges lay, and he was to take part. She took so long tiring herself that he lost patience, and, stamping about in the hall of his castle, shouted up to her that anyone might think she was preparing to meet death. . . . In his anger the forbidden word had passed his lips. To his dismay and anguish, she uttered a despairing shriek, and vanished from his sight. To this day (the gentleman from Normandy told me) you may see a print of her hand at the castle gate through which she passed, and every night she may still be seen, by those who are not too terrified to go near after nightfall, in white, very pale and lovely, wailing round the walls of her old home. . . . So," ended Diane, "you are very sensible and right, France; we must not think or talk of age and ugliness and death, but keep them away silently, as long as ever we can. That is the moral of the tale, I suppose."

"Or perhaps the moral of your tale, Diane," he

said, "is that women should not take so long tiring themselves when men have work or fighting to do."

"Oh, I take little time over that. In the morning I jump from bed into my bath, and in two minutes after I have bathed I am ready for my ride. . . . Here at Moulins one takes longer, when one has to go to the Duchess. And as for men working and fighting, so do women. Madame always says that. She says that there is no difference, except in the body, between men and women, and we maids must always remember it—there is no sex, she says, in a woman's soul different from that in a man's. Madame is always speaking to us of the great deeds of women in the world; Jeanne d' Arc, and that woman who fought on the walls of Marseilles, and the Empress Theodora and a score more; she loves, too, to tell me sometimes of the days when she ruled France, and men who thought little of women had to obey her least word. She was a better man than even King Louis. I love Madame, and she is so interesting to listen to when we are alone. Many things I say Madame has said to me first. Suzanne cannot understand her, and yawns behind her hand, though she tries to be interested. The other day Madame was telling me about the old minstrels, and how their dress differed, and their instruments. In Provence they wore flame-coloured velvet, and had rebecs and psalteries. In Languedoc, they had sackbuts and tambourines, and were under a Captain of their own. In Anjou, Maine, and Touraine, where you come from, the minstrels have also one leader, and play clarionets, flutes and guitars. In Dauphiny, my own country, it is tabors. In Burgundy they wore parti-coloured camlet, slashed with satin, and embroidered with mock jewels; but many of the old fashions and ways are gone; the Duchess is sad about that. In Alsace, they had mulberry doublets, and flags of embroidered scarlet cloth on the trumpets they carried. You see I remember them all. Have you ever heard of Courts of Love, France? The old Knights—but, as Madame says, everything seems changing—had all kinds of rules for love, and all kinds of sayings about it, which their ladies knew and obeyed also. Marriage could never be pleaded as an excuse for

refusing love to another. Now do you think it should?"

"Do you, Diane?"

"But I asked you."

"I do not think it very wifely, or knightly either, to give love to another when troth has been plighted and marriage made. But I do not know much about it, and I know many great nobles and Knights and ladies think and do otherwise. For me, I should try always to be loyal."

"If you were married to me, France—but of course you could not be—if I were married (the Duchess says all girls should be married by thirteen) my husband would have to be true to me and nobody else. . . . Well, that was one of their rules. Then they said that a person who could not keep secrets could never be a lover. But how many girls keep secrets? And another maxim they have; that nobody can really love two at the same time. Is that true, France? I am not sure about that."

He did not answer, and she went on:

"'Every lover is expected to turn pale at the sight of his lady-love.' You do not love me, France; you do not turn pale when you see me. 'At the sudden and unexpected prospect of his lady-love the heart of the true lover invariably beats very fast.'"

She slipped a small, white, very delicate and shapely hand against France's doublet, laughed and said: "Well, it does beat rather quickly, but not very. Perhaps it did when you saw me coming through the gardens. 'A person who is the prey of love eats little and sleeps little.' I cannot be; I eat very well, and sleep very well and peacefully, though I do get up early in the morning, before the world is about if I can. 'A moderate presumption is sufficient to justify the lover in entertaining grave suspicions of another.' And another rule is that nothing prevents one lady being loved by two Knights, or one Knight by two ladies." In the soft dusk following sunset her eyes gleamed mischievously as she looked at France under semi-closed lids, like little, silk-fringed curtains veiling thoughts. He said impatiently: "Why are you talking nonsense,

Diane? You are talking all about love to-night; and if love is like that it must be a funny thing. I do not like women much, except a few." He thought of his dead mother, who was almost less than a happy dream, of the fat, jolly, kindly Madame Belatte at the inn at Montbazon, of Queen Anne—one or two more. And Diane. "Of course I like you, Diane, but you are not really a woman yet."

"I am older than many a woman who was born twenty years before me," said Diane, "I think sometimes I am very, very old."

"Well, you are more like a boy," said France. He was glad she had taken her hand away, and yet half-wished the butterfly touch of it might come again. She said: "France, I will tell you a story about the Courts of Love. Queens and Princesses and great ladies tried Knights and ladies once for breaches of these rules of love, and a jury of beautiful women sat to help the Judges. At one of these Courts, which were sometimes very splendid, and very merry too, a Knight summoned a lady who, when they were children, had vowed always to kiss him when he asked her. He grew up, and went away to Palestine, and came back, and met her; but when he asked her for a kiss she refused, saying they were children no longer. So both the Knight and the lady came before the Court of Love, and made their pleas, and were listened to gravely. The verdict of the ladies was that, since the promise had been given, it must be kept, and she must give him the kiss; but because they were no longer children it would not be proper for her to keep it, so she must give it back at once."

"Did she give him back the kiss?" asked France, laughing. "If she gave him a bigger one than his, or he a bigger one than hers, there might be change to give. . . . Perhaps, Diane, they may be kissing yet!"

"Oh, they are dead long ago, and kissing in Paradise, perhaps." Her mood changed; she was silent, and all the sound in the world seemed the gentle plash and lapping of water, the cooing of birds, the soft whisper of the wind in reeds and trees. Suddenly, impulsively, impetuously, she bent towards him, kissed

him, and again kissed him. "Dear France," she said, "I love you, I love you, and I hate some of these gentlemen here I have to be sweet to, and make pretences to. Whatever happens, you may always claim a kiss if you want it, when we two are alone. It is our pact, like that boy and girl's pact of old-time, but you will never have to drag me to any Court of Love for payment. Now kiss me too, dear France. I am lonely here, and should be glad to go back to St. Vallier; but my father and the Duchess, and Monseigneur de Bourbon, want me to stay here. I am to be one of Suzanne's maids-of-honour soon, but you must go back. Won't you kiss me too, France? You know you must give my kisses again; it is not proper for you to keep them."

He kissed her, and, though he was still a boy, his heart beat fast, in a way he could not quite understand, and his throat and mouth went dry. She stood up. A tiny shiver went over her, as when one's grave is walked upon. "The nights grow colder," she said, and seemed suddenly cold herself as the moon, Diana's emblem. Yet she said: "Now you have kissed me too well, so I must give you change in a kiss." But it was small, cold coin she paid her change in; and she spoke no more as they went over the dewy grass towards the Palace.

§2

The winter of 1513 saw the French driven from Italy. They had suffered an invasion by the Swiss, had been bitterly humiliated by the defeat at Guinegate, and very sorely stricken by the crushing victory of King Henry the Eighth's armies over the Scots at Flodden, when the flower of the Scottish nobility, with ten thousand gallant soldiers of meaner rank but not meaner courage, perished around the body of their King. In vain had Louis sent ships and stores and arms, and his Queen her ring, her gift of golden écus, and her romantic messages, to the Northern ally of France on whose enterprise such high hopes were built. French diplomacy, French arms, French chivalry, alike had failed.

France Caillette missed Diane—now at Moulins or at

Chantelle as a little companion and maid-of-honour to Madame Suzanne—very much indeed. She paid one flying visit to her old home, and then it was as if summer sun had broken into winter; but he thought her somehow changed; in the midst of merry talk and games, or perhaps a ride together in the Vivarais (but some of the bridle-roads and passes they used to take were impassable owing to mud or snow) she became silent, distrait; she seemed also now and then to build a wall between them, so that, though she did not say anything really harsh in words, he felt: "This girl remembers now she is of noble birth, and is proud of her great friends; I am nobody, just a lad helped out of whim, but she, who has raised me to amuse herself in idle hours, is now grown beyond me. Well, she prides herself on being of the Dauphiny *noblesse,* who call themselves the scarlet *noblesse,* and better than any others. I suppose she will marry someone soon. She is old enough; younger girls are married who are less well-born, less rich, less clever, far less lovely than she. Perhaps she has met a young lord already."

On one of their rides together in this brief holiday she told France of a book which the Duchess had written and given to Suzanne. It was called "*Les Enseignements d'Anne de France à sa fille Suzanne de Bourbon,*" and was full of wise maxims and counsels about the education of girls. A picture in the book showed Madame La Grande with her daughter, and, at the end of the saloon where they were, the young girls and women listening devoutly to Madame's words; Diane said that one, she thought, was meant for her, though (she added laughing and looking sidelong at France) it might have been a sister of Lisette. There was much about dignity of rank, its responsibilities towards the common people, good taste, the sordidness of low intrigues, the emptiness and foolishness of coquetries, the rights of women and the need to assert these rights. Girls, Madame said, should learn Latin from the cradle, and not leave such studies to men. At seven they should be able to sustain an intelligent conversation on subjects of interest to adults. And at thirteen they should marry.

At thirteen. . . . Already Madame, indefatigable match-maker as she was, must be looking upon Diane as an almost hopeless spinster, and trying desperately to find her a husband before it was too late.

Diane was so high above France now that he could never have hopes himself, even though she had said she loved him, and would kiss him whenever he asked —he wanted to ask, but did not. Very nervously, when she was chatting of Moulins, and the girls about the Court there (laughing at some of them, but not unkindly) and describing the men with less kindliness, France ventured to say something that was in his mind; obscurely, in a hint, but not too obscurely for the girl's very quick wits to understand. She had spoken of great lords and little lords with a spice of acid; how dull they were, how affected and pompous, how fond of ogling women and thinking women taken in by them —when even all but the dullest women saw through them, and answered in their own coin (the poor fools of men and lads could not see it) and used them for their ends. She talked as if she were very old and wise in the world's ways. She had learnt her lesson pat from the great lady who had ruled France, and had known men, and seen through their schemings and diplomacies; indeed, Diane had improved on her lesson. There was the old Duke of so and so, like an owl, blinking through great round glasses; he was after a very devout young heiress, and talked of nothing but the Fathers and Saints; yet everyone knew that he had in his cabinet, to gloat over secretly, a copy of that disgraceful book which Cesare Borgia brought from Italy. Servants tell tales. There was the Baron of this, the Vidame of that. . . . Diane kept them in a kind of bestiary of her own; an ape, this one; a cockatoo that; this one like a very aged mule gone at the knees, that one like a very slimy eel with a goat's head on its shoulders (but France said eels couldn't have shoulders), another like a camel. The old were bad enough; but the young even more insufferable with their airs and graces and vanities and conceits. How the maids-of-honour laughed over them behind their backs, and they all unconscious!

But, said France, and blushed, were all like that? Was there nobody she saw good in—liked—nobody—nobody Madame liked out of them all, and wanted Diane—— He could not go on, but stammered, for her face turned dusky carnation with anger, and then white as driven snow. She turned her back on him. How graceful even in her turning in anger, or was it affected anger? Or embarrassment? Did she hide something, and use indignation and resentment as a mask?

She came running to him again in a few minutes: "France, there is no one but you I love, and you have a right to ask me, dear, even if we can never marry; I am sorry, dear." And then he saw there were tears in her eyes, and she said suddenly: "I am very unhappy, France. . . . But do not question me about anything like that again, or again I shall be angry."

She was a woman, and he perhaps already a man, though men grow slowly. At least he began to understand one thing, which was that women can never be understood.

§3

Monseigneur Jehan de Poitiers, Comte de St. Vallier, was back from Italy, and very busy with many things. One morning soon after his return he called France to the office where, on his first day at St. Vallier, the boy had had his talk, and been sent away with the man-at-arms to find Romain Maubert, the *Maître-d'hôtel,* who was to tell him his duties. This old grizzled foster-mother—as Maubert had complained of being—was in the room, flustered as ever, his grizzled hair like a cockatoo's, for now the Count kept him on his legs from morning to night. Near the door servants, tenants, tradesfolk, waited deferentially. Soldiers came in and out. St. Vallier greeted him kindly though brusquely, and said that now he was back again, and had had such good reports of France, he had decided to let him try his hand as secretary, and as private and confidential messenger. Without ado or more preamble he was set to work. First of all he searched for a wanted warrant in a bag of sheepskin, and transcribed it. The crabbed, faded writing was difficult, but France took

pains to make a fair and elegant copy. The Count expressed his satisfaction, while grumbling that the writing was not a little bolder; it seemed that Diane had sometimes helped her father, and wrote a very strong, bold hand for a girl; he missed her. After that the days found new occupations; writing letters from dictation to many great folk; drafting out of his own head answers to less important letters; making suggestions when puzzling points arose; hunting up faded parchments; checking accounts and payments; entering up great ledgers; interviewing townsfolk and lesser tenants. The quill ruled now that the sword was back in scabbard, or all but back. Throughout France finances must now be overhauled, every denier looked at twice, success and prosperity restored, the fortunes wasted in war retrieved and re-established. But the Count de St. Vallier had not done so badly, and it was marvellous how, under the King's wise and provident rule at home, the country lived in some show of comfort and prosperity when the reckless ventures across the Alps and elsewhere had come to such grief.

With Diane away France was not sorry for this new work. It was often tedious and dull, but there was much to relieve the monotony, and a sense of humour salted it. Romain Maubert's fussiness and flusters and droll complaints; the Count's strong language which more than once almost entangled itself in letters written from his dictation, the prejudices, obstinacies, timidities, cupidities, of small folk, all had their comical side. And then there were very important missives and documents, holding secret things; some fastened with crimson cords and tassels of the royal house, and the green seal. He had to keep a still tongue about these. The Count was very capable, and as shrewd in business as he had been efficient in war. He loved money, was retentive of his own, and lavish only when his interests seemed best served by generosity or display.

As time went on France was taken more and more into his Master's confidence; he went on various errands of importance, now and then accompanying St. Vallier on his visits to great houses in Dauphiny, and farther afield. Once they made a long journey, to Tours, and

thence to Paris; it was on some business about gentlemen-pensioners. At Tours France met Alec Maclean again. He was full of the late campaigns, and grief-stricken over the disastrous happenings in Scotland. There had been such preparations, such high hopes—yet after all. . . . He showed France letters that had come to him from time to time from a priest who had once taught him, and from kinsfolk; a few loving lines were from his mother, who could not write very well, but in broken words said more than the finest scholar could have said. All seemed irreparable calamity. The fine fleet of sixteen great war-vessels and many smaller vessels, the arms which the King of Denmark had sent, the cannon which Borthwick, the master-gunner, had cast, the vast stores of gunpowder made by Urnebrig the German, lately in Scottish pay, the gold of Anne of Brittany—all worse than wasted! They might have left the forests standing which had been cut down to build the *St. Michael* and the *Margaret* and the *James* and other fine battleships, for all the good the fleet had done; some of the ships had vanished without trace, and not a shot been fired. King James had had a hundred thousand of the bravest men in the world at his back—and where were they now? He had had a strange warning, to be sure, of the fate in store. A few days before King James set out, said Alec impressively, he went from his palace at Linlithgow to St. Michael's Church, which was adjacent to it, for vespers. While he knelt at prayer a venerable and stately figure entered the aisle. The head of this stranger was uncovered; his hair was parted over the forehead, and flowed down his shoulders; his robe was blue, and tied round the loins with a linen girdle. His majestic air inspired all who saw him with awe. Approaching the King, he said in solemn tones: "Sir, I am sent to warn you not to proceed in your present undertaking, for if you do it shall not fare well either with yourself or with those who go with you. Further, it has been enjoined me to bid you shun the familiar society and counsels of women lest they occasion your disgrace and destruction." He spoke in a loud, clear voice, but somehow unnatural and other-worldly, so that, all hear-

ing him distinctly, there was general consternation. Without any obeisance to the King, or any notice of others present, the figure retreated and was lost among the crowd. Sir David Lindsay and Sir James Inglis, who belonged to the household of the young Prince, were beside the King when it happened. There was much talk at the time about this mysterious stranger and his warning, though some said that it was all stratagem of their English Queen, King Henry's sister; who knew her husband's love of strange women, and did not want him to war against her brother. Alec said that some folk would always scoff and be sceptical, though one rose from the dead to warn them; and went off in an aside to speak solemnly of the second sight (he used a strange Gaelic word) and of death warnings such as knockings, and the baying of hounds round a house, and seers who in his part of Scotland could tell what was to come. In the Bible days did not men prophesy? For himself, nothing would convince him but that this was a messenger from another world, and no stratagem. Alec, who loved preaching, paused nevertheless to repeat his solemn warnings against women. His own mother was an exception to all rules, but for the rest . . . Who was this Diane of whom France spoke so much? Beauty was skin deep, and if Alec had any heresy at all, he said, it was in believing that the serpent was a woman. Pretty playthings, women, whom the world would have got on much better without if God had devised it so. They were so inferior to men that the first had to be made out of a man's rib; and, when France protested that without women the earth would never have been populated, he said in his Scottish French: "Man, you are wrong; with a little assistance from the Creator man could have managed all that better by himself."

He told France of Lady Heron, that beautiful and artful woman whose husband was prisoner in Scotland, and who, they said, enslaved King James into telling her his plans and secrets. Alec knew, it seemed, every detail of Flodden as if he had been there himself; the Scottish Archers had every man of them lost kinsfolk and friends there, and even now could talk of little else.

France could almost see that calamitous field; the chivalrous and gallant King refusing Borthwick permission—though he begged it on his knees—to fire on the English columns when they were at a disadvantage; poor old Angus in tears when his wise counsel was rejected with a contemptuous: "If you are afraid, you may go home;" Lindsay of the Byres, old hardened warrior, threatened with hanging at his gate if he persisted in unwelcome advice, and warning. . . . France saw the rude huts and booths which had sheltered the Scottish army burst into flames when King James gave his order; the scrambling descent of the hill towards Brankston; the Scottish army formed into the five battles—in squares, in wedges—but all in line, within a bowshot of each other. Then the silent march screened by smoke-clouds—the sudden freshening of the wind, driving away the smoke, and revealing the enemy only a quarter of a mile distant. . . . It was at four on that fateful and terrible September afternoon, said Alec, that the battle commenced, with Huntley and Home's furious and at first successful charge. Home's Borderers had indeed thought the field already won, and scattered in search of loot. Blunders everywhere, rashness everywhere, mistaken chivalries, the King's weakness for women—these, said Alec, lost Scotland. But how splendid that failure! He made France see King James, gallant and reckless to the last, flinging himself at the head of lances and billmen, and the flower of his nobility rushing to make a wall about him. It was no fault of the Highlanders that their broadswords and axes were ineffectual against English bowmen; the archers galled them terribly; they broke through all restraint, their French officers, whose language many of them could not understand, trying vainly to stop their mad rush on the squares of stolid English pikemen who, after the first shock of the undisciplined, maddened onset, were able to slaughter them like sheep. Macleans, Macleods, Campbells—all the Highland Clans who fought—suffered no disgrace in their route, but to some Alec gave grudging praise and certain censures, not able to forget old antipathies and hereditary hatreds. It was late in the evening

when King James, fighting with reckless courage, fell pierced by an English arrow and then took his mortal wound from an English bill—he was within a few paces only of Lord Surrey. There were many still who refused to believe the King dead, some saying that the disfigured corpse carried to Richmond was that of one of his Court and not his at all, and others carrying the tale further, maintaining that he had escaped and gone on pilgrimage to Jerusalem. But Alec made no doubt of it. Not a home in Scotland but mourned its dead. His mother had written to tell him how Lauchlan Maclean of Duart had come to his end on that terrible field, where the flower of Scotland perished with its King.

France was taken into the Archers' Guardroom, drank with the stout fellows there, and met several he had known. But he liked best to sit on the edge of Alec's vast wooden bed—as he was sometimes wont to do at Loches—and talk of those they both knew, and go over old stories and little happenings together, and have news of folk. Glareanus with his frizzy hair and round little belly still put his choir-boys through their ut, ray, me's; but King Louis had been too busy for Motets in any key. The Queen had not been too well; at times she suffered much, but was very brave; she and the King had many sharp passages, for her tongue was always like a sword quickly out of scabbard, yet it was wonderful how happy they were together, respecting one another, and loving one another, as royal folk in harness did not always do. Of late she had taken to pencilling her eyebrows more and using paint, defying ill-health, and striving to conceal it from him. Her Confessor, Maheuc, visited her constantly; a wise, kindly, gentle man.

And the old comrades of the *Salle des Fous?*

France, since he went to St. Vallier, had written twice (in simple words and big letters) to his father; the first letter had brought, after a lapse of many weeks, an illiterate scrawl, which, puzzled out, assured him that Papa was doing famously, and would do more famously yet; he had invented some new jests which had put Triboulet, his rival, to complete discomfiture in a contest of wits; he asked after Lisette, gave France

paternal and very edifying counsels, reproached him gently with forgetfulness of benefits, reminded him that careful and loving guidance had set his feet on the ladder of success—and ended with a hint at a loan. France sent him a little money, but it was not even acknowledged, and a second letter asking after his father's health was not answered. One of Papa's old jests had been of a man who borrowed money from a friend, and had told him he appreciated his goodness so much that he could never repay him—and this story Papa had evidently fitted to his own case. Now and then France reproached himself because he felt no desire to see his father. The early days of constant hardship and privation, of fear, of flagellations, of uncertainty whether a minute might bring forth a blow, a kick, a sermon, or some maudlin gush of slobbering and uncomfortable affection, were like a nightmare dreamed long ago. St. Vallier and Dauphiny were so far away from the early wanderings, and even from the *Salle des Fous*.

But Caillette had been promoted; he slept in the *Salle des Fous* no longer—said Alec—but in his capacity of Kitchen-Fool had wheedled the Master-Cook, a great man, into friendship, and had been given a tiny cell of his own not far from the great fireplace, where he slept snug as beetle or bug. He lived like a King; there were always delicacies going. France had been more than once in the immense kitchens at Loches—wonderful places, with many under-cooks and turnspits at work, sewers running to and fro with dishes and trenchers, colossal hooks and jacks, wonderful and ingenious iron cages shaped like chickens, piglets, ducks, fish, pheasants, and others into which eggs and flour and spices and all kinds of ingredients were poured to make perhaps jellies, custards, sweetmeats. Papa had a jest about Cardinal Balue being jellied in such a cage. These, being closed, were thrust into the fire until the dish was required ready for the royal banquet. 'And the wines. The Kitchen-Fool was in luck's way; in the very capital and heart of a Cockaigne of good living. He was astute enough to make himself a personality even in a sphere comparatively humble, pay-

ing for what he had with tales, jests, stupidities which set his company on a roar. There was a new invention of his about a fish he had once trained to live without water; he said that he had taught it to walk after him round a garden path, and it had so far forgotten its early habits that when, on an unlucky day, it fell into a puddle it was drowned. Another tale that went round and came to the King's ears was that he had once devised a cannon-ball for naval warfare, which rebounded against the side of the ship against which it was fired, and, returning to the gunner, could be used over and over again. This had tickled King Louis a good deal, and now and then Caillette was summoned to amuse his guests in the *Logis du Roy*. He had another tale lately—it was as old as the hills, but new to Loches—of a man who had dug a hole in the floor of a prison cell in order to escape, and, seeing that the dislodged earth would betray him, had dug another hole to bury it in.

There was still deadly rivalry between Triboulet and Papa; they hated one another venomously; but Papa seemed able to hold his own. He drank more than ever, and preached more than ever the virtue of temperance, even abstinence. The more he changed, the more he stayed the same.

§4

The days at Tours passed too quickly. France loved Alec, his loyal, brave, careful, dogmatic, generous friend, and was whole-heartedly sorry when the day came to take his great freckled hand in good-bye. Alec was concerned about his report of St. Vallier. Too soft a life, he said, and a quill was no proper weapon for a man. There was so much talk of women also. This Diane. . . . Marriage was an excellent thing and Alec said nothing against it—for women. For a man it was the end and ruin of all. Every woman, of course, should be married; she had everything to gain by it, and nothing at all to lose. But it would have been better confined to women; a man who loved freedom, had a career to make, and meant to leave his mark on the world, would shun women like the peste. France

had no thought of such things, and certainly no hope that one so far above him as Diane de Poitiers would, or could even if she would, be more to him than a good playfellow and comrade and friend. Ah, but matters began like that, though luckily she seemed not to hate him, which was the most fatal sign of love's beginning in the world. Let France take heed, and remember all in history whom concern about women had led to ruin. True, he was still a boy, though nearly over the threshold of manhood, and at his age others had before now led armies, or regiments at least, and done feats of arms. There was a certain Bayard they began to talk about. . . .

From the height of a few added years Alec Maclean, to whom France could speak more freely and openly than to anyone in the world, even Diane herself—freezing so suddenly and unexpectedly after sunshine—gave sage counsel before they parted.

The way to Paris lay through Cellettes, Les Aubrais, Étampes, Bretigny, Juvisy, Choisy, Ivry; the Count and France, with their company, travelled easily; Paris was only a hundred and forty-five miles away. His master had much business to do here, and many great folks to see. The King had come on from Tours a few days earlier. France had only half a dozen words from him; the Count took his young secretary once to the Tournelles Palace, where he was kept kicking his heels in an ante-room while his master was closeted with his master's master, and at last was called in to take away some documents which had been signed. St. Vallier introduced him as the lad in whom the Duke of Bourbon had interested himself, and King Louis complimented him on the change in his fortunes. Indeed, it was a very different France Caillette from the little gabardined urchin who had wandered with his father (or pretended father) into Loches on that summer's afternoon. He had grown out of knowledge, and was dressed with some show of fashion, though not richly; he spoke correctly, could write an elegant letter, knew his Latin, had some acquaintance with the ways and habits of gentlefolk. He did not see the Queen, and someone said she had gone into Brittany, where

she was always happier than in France, and far happier than in Paris, which she disliked.

And, for that matter, France was disappointed in Paris, of which he had heard so much. The Parisians, after the good, easy, honest countryfolk, seemed to him fickle, insincere, and turbulent; the traders rarely scrupled to take advantage of provincial simplicity and ignorance. Living was very dear there. There were vast open sewers, and one could smell Paris mud long before one reached the outskirts of the city; even in the Palace the stench was almost intolerable. Plague came frequently, and, though at the moment Paris was free from it, he saw on some houses faded crosses showing where it had slain victims. There was a maze of streets so narrow that people could lean from windows and shake hands with the neighbours opposite. At every step one had to be wary, and keep ears open for the "*Gare l'eau!*" which presaged but too often followed a deluge of odorous filth from upper windows. When the scavengers' carts passed, it meant but a scattering of different filth. Yet the Parisians never tired of praising Paris as the centre of the civilized world, and were contemptuous of even their own country beyond its walls and gates. Of course amid this squalor there was much to interest and please the eye. Now one would see great ladies passing in splendid litters or *en croupe;* they were patched and made-up; and it amazed France to notice that even some of the unenclosed nuns in the streets had painted faces. A noble would go by with an escort of running lackeys and, at night, of torches; there would be scholars pacing the Vigne de Laas, lawyers and law clerks about the Palais de Justice, and in its precincts jewellers, glass-workers, and trinket booths; beggars and cut-throats slunk about the Cour des Miracles; anglers fished from the banks of the Seine and its five islands; he saw monks of many orders—brown-grey Franciscans, black and white Dominicans, shaven Carthusians, black Trappists, and pageants and religious processions with crosses, banners, lanterns, candles; a Prince of the Church now and again, a Cardinal perhaps and his guards; and brisk shopfolk, women of the town, tramping soldiers, dogs, sheep,

cattle, horses roped tail to head. One day he went out to the hill, like a little Calvary for unheeded and desperate and dangerous men, where the sixteen gallows of Montfaucon rose against the sky-line. The execution place was beyond the walls; crows circled over the great beams with their hanging ropes and rusty chains, set thirty feet or so above the ground. Stout railings kept back the crowds, and the basement was of stone with iron gratings set in it, and the gibbets themselves of rough, unhewn stone; two smaller gibbets stood close by.

During their short stay in Paris, the Duke of Bourbon came to his house in the Little Louvre, and his friend the Count of St. Vallier went there often, and once or twice took France. The Duke asked France many questions, and was obviously pleased with him. France had much writing to do for his master. The Count also went frequently to the Palace of Justice and the Lawyers' haunts, though he professed, with many oaths, to despise these fellows of the long robe, and notaries, and all that crew, who, he said, reminded him of the Montfaucon crows, squabbling, greedy, in at every death to get pickings. Many noblemen and gentlemen came to pay their respects to the Count, and one of whom France was to hear more before long was a certain very great nobleman of Normandy. He was ugly and deformed, and France had seen him at Moulins, at the hunt. He remembered it was the hunts-man on the tall black horse who had tried to help Diane and had spoken to him so brusquely. After his master had been with this gentleman France had more figuring and writing to do.

So they ended their stay, and came back by easy stages to St. Vallier where green slime coated the moat, and dragon-flies skimmed the waters of the Galaure, and Romain Maubert grumbled, and Madame de Rancé was all in a flutter about Monseigneur's return, and the gardener tended the little garden which the old Count was never to grumble and doze in any more. The fountain flashed and sparkled, but Diane, fresher and prettier than the flowers, brighter and more sparkling than the silvery, plashing waters, was not

there to give them welcome—the Vivarais mountains, blue on the horizon, heard no longer her singing, or the clatter of her palfrey's hoofs.

CHAPTER XVI THE QUEEN IS DEAD: LONG LIVE THE QUEEN!

" Anne fut le nom d'elle, en France deux fois Reine,
Duchesse des Bretons, royale et souveraine
Ce cœur fut si très haut, que de la terre aux cieux
Sa vertu liberale accrossit mieux à mieux."

JEAN MAROT.

§1

EARLY in 1514 King Louis's good Queen died at Blois; she was about thirty-eight years old. For some time past she had been ailing; a sharp attack of the stone carried her off after only a few days of fierce, final agony which the doctors could do nothing to relieve. Brave she was; but her heart-rending cries, until the last peace hushed them, could be heard even in Blois streets, and the people who had learnt to love her waited before the Palace in awed silence, whispering bitter things about the incompetence of leeches, and remembering in a dull melancholy their own humanity, and what they themselves might one day be called upon to face, if Honorat Picquet and Solomon de Bombelles and all the other royal physicians and surgeons were powerless to save from pain and death one so rich, so powerful, so famous—so good. This Queen had harmed none with intention, and helped very many. Her bounties were unstinted. Loving her own Brittany better than any land in all the world, she had never yet spared herself where the welfare of her husband's realm was concerned, its interest jeopardized, its glory assailed. She was no respecter of persons, and held her rank as a high dignity conferred by God, to be prized and valued, held tenaciously, kept unsullied; yet a great and dangerous gift compelling her to almost austere self-mastery, and solicitude for those less fortunate. She failed often, and knew her failure; but there was a heart of gold under the gilded and tinsel trappings, lent for a little space of time, which moth and rust must inevitably corrupt.

The King was inconsolable. He had treated poor Queen Jeanne, gentle and self-sacrificing as she was, badly; but then marriage was none of his choice. He had chosen Queen Anne. There were some who said that he loved her even before King Charles's death; this was not quite true. But they were real tears he had shed when he had rushed to Amboise directly his predecessor's tragic and unexpected end opened the way to the throne for him, and Anne, the young widow, needed his consolation and help in her great grief. Love came gradually, but was strong and real when it came, and not less strong because, with each, it was founded on esteem. Both had been true and loyal, in an age when fidelity was not too common among those of high station.

And now King Louis was left desolate, alone, thinking of innumerable things; for days he shut himself away, in a darkened room, seeing hardly anyone, grovelling on the marble floor in agonies of grief, blubbering and sighing: "My Bret! My good, dear Bret! My good companion and wife!" He was lost without her. Her changing moods were softened by memory and death. No more should he see her coming from Mass and her face lighting at her faithful Bretons waiting on the Bretons' perch at Blois; no more see her among her twenty-eight maids of honour, her sixteen ladies, or with her hundred gentlemen and her pages on days of state; or teaching tapestry-stitch to the little girls she fostered; or giving alms; or on her splendid barge, chatting to her watermen. She had been masterful sometimes, querulous and difficult often; but how much one could forgive—as he had so often said—to a woman who loved her husband and the realm! She was so quickly penitent for her faults. They understood one another. A hundred things he had been angry over once he could smile at indulgently through tears as his grief became slowly assuaged, to leave only a heart-ache, an incredulity at such an impossible fact as death, almost intolerable longing and loneliness, when on waking from sleep he realized that his faithful partner was no longer there to face the days with him, to counsel, to solace, to help. In death she looked very

young and beautiful as she had not been in life. It was no shame to her that, loving her Church, she had said sharp things about his quarrel with the Pope. In his heart he knew she had been right about the betrothal of Claude, their daughter and, as he said now, his only solace (but there was little Renée also). Francis was vain, extravagant, over-fond of show and dress, impatient of restraint, disloyal in love, and shameless, always in some mad escapade or amour; a great, spoilt boy, adored by a very foolish mother. If he came to the throne, as seemed inevitable now, he would undo all Louis's and Anne's patient work, and spoil everything. In deep mourning for the Queen, before a congregation in black, and Claude bitterly weeping all the time, Francis and Claude were quietly married four months or so after the Queen had been carried to her tomb with much empty pomp but amid the real love and affection of all her subjects. Louise of Savoy, the mother of the heir-apparent, found herself suddenly a personage of influence and importance. At Moulins she had become the little ward of her aunt, Madame La Grande, on losing her parents; she was then only five. At thirteen she was married, at eighteen a widow, penniless, with her two children, Francis and Marguerite, to provide for. Her life at her husband's mean and squalid little Court at Cognac had been miserable; she was miserable again at Moulins when her aunt welcomed her back to that splendid, quiet but austere asylum. She resented her dependence, and felt no gratitude for a hospitality which reminded her over and over again of insignificance and helplessness. When King Louis came to the throne, she followed the Court in quest of better fortunes; now to Chinon, now to Blois, now to Amboise, now to Romorantin, dragging her precious little "Cæsar," the young Count Francis, and his sister, with her; always a dependent, always watched and under suspicion, always embittered, always openly disliked by the Queen and treated with a kindly off-hand tolerance by the King, and herself using servility, assumed meekness, and sweet words as cards in a great game. One day her Cæsar must be King if—if the King and Queen

had no male child. Her first triumph came when, against Queen Anne's advice and wish, the Princess Claude and Francis were betrothed. The mother of the heir-apparent now had her own establishment and household. She had granted her fifteen gentlemen, twelve ladies and maids-of-honour, seventy-eight guards and servants. At the little Court she set up the license was unrestrained. The careful teachings of Moulins, all its wise and prudent austerities, were forgotten. The example of simplicity and homely living practised by King and Queen in their private lives had been irksome, and a reproach; now she was free. At Moulins she had known Charles de Montpensier, and an early admiration for him had grown from liking into almost passion, and was to grow into the one over-mastering passion of her life. But he would have none of her, smiling away easily, in his dark, almost saturnine fashion, her advánces; he was now married to Suzanne —and, insignificant, lame, almost plain as the girl was, he loved his wife and was happy with her, and loyal. Louise had many amours, and small difficulty in finding lovers among the handsome officers of her Court, but the man she wanted would not come to her, or would treat her only with courteous scorn. His laurels in Italy and Burgundy were for Suzanne and not for her.

But with the marriage of Francis to Claude some, at least, of her ambitions were attained. It seemed almost incredibly fortunate that, so soon, and at an age so early, her greatest enemy and rival, the Queen, had been taken. Francis and Claude were at last safely married. There could be no little son born now to the sovereigns to put her Cæsar in the background, and rob him of the throne of France.

Unless. . . .

A fear came of things so remote, so improbable, that at first it was just a wisp or film passing for an instant through the mind, to be laughed at, and ignored. Louis was nearing fifty-four, but much older than his years; he was frequently ill. The reverses from which his country had suffered and the effects of which were still felt, had lessened his prestige abroad, and even if any suitable alliance could be found there must be embassies, nego-

tiations, tedious and prolonged diplomacies, very possibly ending in failure. And he had loved his wife dearly—was disconsolate without her—had said that his day was over, he could love none other, and wanted nothing now but an unmolested close to a troubled and painful life. . . . And then the fear clutched suddenly at her very heart, for rumours began, and grew, and hardened into menacing fact. Isolated in Europe, King Louis, they said, was prepared to sacrifice himself for France. The new Pope Leo X was interesting himself in the troubles of the Most Christian King. A treaty was arranged, and signed in London. Like Madame La Grande, the Pope had an itch to make matches, and young King Harry of England had another sister to wed. She was already in love, with an English nobleman 'twas said, but her brother and she had made a bargain. Everyone knew that Jean Perréal, doctor, painter, maker of beautiful glass for Tours and other cathedrals, soldier, sailor, diplomat (a wonderful old man, that, who had been in King Charles's service, and was in much favour with the late Queen Anne of blessed memory, on whose great ship he had served) was now in England, helping to choose a trousseau for the Lady Mary; and carrying a letter from King Louis, in his own hand, to Cardinal Wolsey, urging that French fashions might be chosen. . . . Rumour hardened into fact.

So Mary of England, aged sixteen, beautiful, high-spirited, proud, betrothed already and in love with another, was sold to the French King, elderly, infirm, gouty, and twice a widower. It was a matter of policy and the good of the realm he loved so dearly; he protested that, for himself, he had loved his late Queen, and had no mind to re-marry. In Touraine skies many portents were seen before Queen Anne had been long in her splendid tomb. There were fiery serpents, balls of fire; omens significant of the King's own death to come very shortly. Queen Anne, they said, was calling him, and could not rest without him. But the negotiations went on, and were ended. After all, another Dauphin might be born, to another Queen. After all, Louise of Savoy's spoilt darling's nose might be broken,

and her young "Lord and Cæsar and King" miss his kingdom.

§2

There was a proxy-marriage at Greenwich; when October began a great fleet escorted the Lady Mary to the shores of France. The autumnal gales were raging, and the voyage to Boulogne was long and tempestuous and most tragical. Fourteen great ships set out from Dover; only four reached their destination. The Lubeck, of four tops, was lost close to Calais, with four hundred mariners and soldiers appointed to be the new Queen's escort. The sands and dunes of the Pas de Calais—under Blanc Nez, at Wissant, and by the swirling waters of its tiny river, at Gris Nez, all along that coast—were strewn and choked with bodies. The seas foamed over masts, cordage, sails, and on the tall waves tossed boxes and crates of precious gifts, of splendid robes, of jewels and goldsmiths' work, utterly spoilt and ruined. At the entrance to Boulogne harbour the ship which carried the Lady Mary and her ladies went aground; boats, at great jeopardy to the rescuers, hastened to their help; an English knight took the young Princess in his arms and carried her through the surf.

Alec Maclean had gone to Boulogne with a detachment of the Scottish Guard to welcome the new Queen; he went by order, reluctantly, fuming that a soldier should be sent to greet the girl-bride of an old and failing King; 'twas women's work. There was some small grain of consolation, perhaps, in the fact that this bride was own sister to the hapless Queen of Scots. But she was sister to Henry of England, and, remembering Flodden and all it meant for Scotland, he had no love for the business. "Heaven is no place for fools," a tale reported St. Peter as saying to a man twice miserably married. Louis had been miserable enough with poor Queen Jeanne, the ugly, deformed woman he had been forced to marry, and had treated so ill. He had survived a second wife with whom, it was true, he had been happy—but not without many ups and downs; a dangerous, precarious happiness, often in jeopardy

through sharp words and stormy disagreements, through which only a real affection could steer safely. At the best, a ticklish business, this business of marriage; Alec himself thanked his stars that he was too wise to fall into traps set for him, and was strong enough to stand alone without a woman's bickering and interference and whimperings when she could not have her own way. He saw no great need in the world for women, except, of course, his mother in Scotland, who had the sense and virtues of a man.

He admitted grudgingly that the Lady Mary was a fine lass, drenched and tousled as she was, with her fair hair in rats'-tails about her neck, and her rich travelling dress all spoilt; she dashed the spray out of her eyes and laughed as she was carried up the beach. Royally brave, this girl. . . . But what a scared, cackling, frightened crowd of hens with her—from Lady Guildford to the smallest unimportant tire-maiden—seemed as the boats packed with them came near, and English and French helped them ashore! Nearly all were sea-green pale with sickness after the long and terrible crossing; many half-insane with fright, and squealing, wriggling, mumbling Paternosters and Aves in a panic as they were tossed in the arms of Mars when Neptune had nearly done with them. All but one boatload had been shepherded and bundled ashore. Some were on their knees in the wet sand and pebbles; some in a limp, huddled crowd, with French officials and fisher-folk jabbering and gesticulating round them—adding to their fright—but some composed, collected, brave. Among the women were men whose eyes and faces showed terror, some few were gay and unconcerned, others noisy and hysterical; one here was bragging about his valour in the danger they had passed, another whining about his sins, and calling all to witness that henceforth he would make amends for the past, knowing now how fearful was death to which all men wend. Terrible and lonely and cold indeed was death after warm life, when its teeth showed in the white gleam of interminable waves, when miles and miles of dark sea lay between one and England, when the roar of breakers on wild and desolate and unknown coasts mingled with

shrieking winds and spitting rain to welcome one to France.

The last boat, pulled shorewards by lusty but villainous-looking fishermen and other sea-folk of Boulogne port, had nearly reached safety. They avoided the rough stones of the little quay or cob—where the bleared yellow eyes of cressets lit the scene; the waves were too strong and tall to risk the little craft being crushed by them against that rugged and pitiless landing-place. The boat was badly overloaded, and sank in deepish water within a few yards of shore. There was a wild rush to save the occupants, all of whom, fortunately, were fished out, but more dead than alive, and dragged like bundles of drenched merchandise up the sands. The ship lay in a haze of mist and rain and spray, her great hull wedged immovably in submerged sand, though she shuddered from stem to stern under the constant impact of waves, and her masts had already gone. The next thought was for the goods the ship contained. In this vessel which had borne the Lady Mary to her bridal were wardrobes of costly raiment, presents, gold, innumerable things of value fitting for the provision of a Queen coming with her retinue to her husband's realm. The ship was breaking up fast, and as many hands as possible were called upon to man the now empty boats and go out to the wreck.

Suddenly, through the roar of waters and wind, and hiss of rain, came a hoarse shout from the rowers of the first boat to draw near the ship. There were living beings still aboard and in jeopardy! In the panic of leaving some had been forgotten, whose cries for help had been unheard. Alec Maclean with a few of his comrades of the Guards was watching all from the cob. A stout little craft had been drawn high on the roughly-paved slope; here they were almost as near the wreck as those in the first boat that approached it, and, young giants trained to manly exercise and arms, they had muscles and sinews lacking to the punier fisherfolk and boatmen of the port who, their red woollen caps rising and falling, their oars plunging wildly, their voices, many hoarse with drink, further hoarsened with excited shouting as they pulled at sixes and sevens. "Come

on, lads," cried one great Scot of the Guard, and half a dozen, Alec among them, ran the boat towards the water's edge, waited their chance with a receding wave, and sprang in. It was a race between watermen and Guards, but the first were soon outdistanced. One of the soldiers started a Highland boating-song, and the others took it up, so that the oars kept such time as they could to the measure.

Herded together on the ship were a man, a scullion-boy, half a dozen women, who, in the general panic, had been overlooked, or missed their chance, or perhaps been in the deep bowels of the great vessel when the boats left. Seas washed over them; they clung for dear life to such of the gear near them as still stood. All, save the man and one girl, showed in different ways the extreme of terror. The boy cried piteously for his mother; an elderly woman shrieked to saint after saint for aid, another laughed, and laughed, in a fearful hysteria of mock-mirth. . . . The man's face was grey, his teeth set, he had his arm round one woman who lay in it limp and seemingly lifeless. The girl Alec had noticed was a little distance from the rest. She was of small build, inclined to darkness, with soft, quick eyes which seemed to take in all that passed, looking on with an odd kind of detached curiosity. From a fragment of broken mast a small red lamp glimmered below a tiny, unbroken shrine and cast a curious light on the scene. Brave this girl, evidently, like her young Queen, and Alec, having no love for squealers in danger, whether men or women, made his way towards her over the sloping and slippery deck. He heard her shout a soothing word to a young girl in the group who was beside herself with misery and fear. "Up heart, Sybil, up heart. Look, the lamp is still burning though all is ruin and wrack, my dear. Be drowned? Why, you have said that a thousand times the voyage through, and we are not drowned yet, and here help comes as I said."

But the girl, hardly more than a child, moaned: "Oh, if we had never come! Oh, why did we leave our dear, dear England for this awful country?"

Alec went up to the girl who had first spoken.

"Come," he said, roughly. "Mademoiselle, 'tis your turn now; you shall come first, for by St. Bride, I have no mind to carry those who screech like dying pigs when a little danger threatens and men are near to listen."

She turned towards him, her eyes soft and quick in the faint red glow of the little lamp.

"No, take the little maid; I can fend for myself better. I am content to wait; and from this voyage, sir, I have learnt that men are not always braver than women. No, I do not want you to carry me."

In her mouth were hints of obstinacy and even a little sulkiness; not unpleasing, for it was a pretty mouth enough; but it was her calm courage that touched him, and not prettiness just then. He said: "'Tis no matter of wanting, Mademoiselle, but of doing as you are told. Come; you cannot get into boat alone. In her drenched skirts, 'tis not easy for a woman."

"Then I will shed them. I can help myself, and scramble in my own way."

"You shall do as you are told," he said curtly, and made to lift her, but her eyes flamed. Already, though, the boy and the little maid and the other women were being carried by stout Scottish arms to the tossing boat; the man on the wreck was lifting down to them the girl whom his arm shielded; when Alec lifted and carried her, not too gently, she made no resistance any more. She was light as a feather in his arms, and made no murmur as he bore her to the broken bulwark, and, watching his moment, dropped her into the arms of his comrades, then jumped and scrambled into his own place. "I am glad you are not the screaming sort, Mademoiselle," he said gruffly.

She did not answer, and they sat cramped together in the packed boat, she swaying and moving as he plied his difficult oar so that she might not hamper him. Through the slack water following a great wave that had broken over them they reached the sands, and through the surf he carried her, and helped her through drifted dunes of sand to where a group awaited them. But the Lady Mary and most of her company were already warm at their inns. She held out a hand, small and limp and cold, and said: "Thank you."

"There is no need for thanks," he said gruffly. "Give God and Our Lady those, Mademoiselle. But you may thank any stars you have that you did not scream or clutch me to strangle me, as some do, for by St. Bride, I should have dropped you like a hot brick in the sea; no woman on earth is worth a soldier's drowning."

"I am not the screaming sort," she said, echoing his words.

"No—but you are a woman none the less, and obstinate as twenty pigs, Mademoiselle, as I perceive. So good night to you."

But he did not turn away, and they were both silent a minute. Then she said: "I do thank you. . . . But I am no hot brick, Monsieur, and will you not see me housed? I am to go where my Lady Mary is."

So Alec Maclean, who could not tolerate women, helped in the bringing ashore of a cargo-load, and went with one through the narrow, evil-smelling Boulogne street, splashing through mud and puddles, and at last saw her safely housed. He was very dour and silent when he joined his comrades at their drink.

§3

King Louis with a splendid train met his new Queen about a league from Abbeville. Alec Maclean and the detachment of Archers of the Guard rode with the Princess among her escort; the survivors of her English Guard which King Henry, her brother, had furnished rode with her also; stout fellows all, in doublets of green satin, with belts of black velvet, and shaggy red and white hats. These, though peace had been made, took small pains to conceal their dislike and contempt for the French; with four hundred good comrades lying drowned and white and swollen on the Pas de Calais sands there was much grumbling among themselves over waste of gallant lives for the wedding of an old drinking and gluttonous Frenchman (this was how they unfairly summed him) and a strapping, handsome English girl who never wanted him. The Lady Mary was certainly very lovely; many who saw her echoed the report of the Venetian, Pasqualigo, that she

had not her match in all England. She was tall, fair, with colour in her cheeks again after her late experience; and bore herself with grace and affability towards all with whom she came in contact. At sixteen the gaiety of childhood had not gone, nor its excitement at adventure; perhaps this as well as Richmond air was responsible for the heightened colour which was the subject of comment everywhere among a people more familiar with pallor or sallowness. She bore herself proudly also, but in a natural and easy way, as a girl glad to be English, glad to show herself so among strangers; it was the merest touch of hauteur in one who remembered herself daughter of a great King, sister of one, bride-to-be of one, even one she did not want. In repose her scarlet lips pressed a little too tightly, perhaps, over the small white teeth; now and then a shade of slight weariness, and sometimes wistfulness, was in her eyes, clouding them; but only for a moment; she mastered herself instantly. Her bargain was made; she was to be Queen of France, and go down as that to history; afterwards she was to have her own will. That had been promised; men said it might not be long. She meant her part of the bargain to be kept honourably even if it hurt to keep it.

She rode a fine white palfrey caparisoned with cloth of gold on white, and wore a dress of cloth of gold on crimson; the sleeves were cut close after the English fashion, for King Louis's letter to Wolsey that French fashions should be worn had been petulantly ignored for this first journey on French soil; she was English, and would show it. Her ornaments were of gold, and two enormous pearls were on the left side of her headtire; her hat was of crimson silk, shaggy after the style of her Guards'. Her fair hair, long and beautiful, flowed in tresses down her back. In her progress she waved her hand tirelessly to the gaping and doffing onlookers; villagers, groups of labourers at the edges of fields, townsfolk. Closely in attendance were Lady Guildford, the other ladies, and maids-of-honour, some riding, some in litters; the Queen had herself chosen to ride, being a fine horsewoman, with a true English love for horseflesh. On a small Camargue mare rode the

girl whom Alec Maclean had taken, with only a few words between them, through the wet narrow streets of Boulogne to the Lady Mary's lodging. It was drizzling even now, and again and again came a sharp downfall, not improving the gayness of the cavalcade. But throughout the Princess showed a gravely-gallant and even lively bearing, partly, no doubt, assumed. Her bargain made, she would go through to the last letter, bravely, with a high stomach and good countenance. But in her heart she saw another face than that of the man to whom she had been sold, and was now going, Perhaps some in the cheering crowds pitied her a little, and some, remembering good Queen Anne and the days that had now become the old days, pitied more their ageing King.

Louis, riding to the rendezvous near Abbeville, showed no sign of pity for himself. He rode a magnificent Spanish horse, black as jet, and caparisoned with cloth of gold and black satin, for he had not yet altogether cast aside his recent mourning. He was himself in cloth of gold on crimson, as was his bride, the coat cut short for the saddle. When the new Queen and her retinue were within sight men saw him square his shoulders and command himself to sit more youthfully and upright; he kissed his hand to her, and then, his escort drawing aside at a sharp word of command from the officers, rode very boldly up to her as if they had been intimate friends of old, threw his arm around her neck, and kissed her (they said afterwards) as kindly and gallantly as if he had been five and twenty instead of twenty years more. It was a glad sight to him to see that report had not deceived him, and that, making a needful pact he had at first small mind or liking for, he was to take this young, gay, lovely English girl to his bed. She was as fresh as English roses, and as bright and fragrant; a little thorny too when grasped too suddenly and rudely. So in the rain they rode on together.

At Abbeville, Alec Maclean—and he was not sure in his mind whether to his liking or disliking—came upon the maid he had brought ashore. It was on a narrow stairway to the gallery of the inn, at a bend where they must needs halt a moment before passing, and for courtesy's sake exchange a word. She thanked him

handsomely enough. He let her know, somewhat churlishly, for he could never bring himself to bow and scrape and languish at a woman, that he wanted no thanks at all, and asked her, after awkward silence, how she liked France now she was in it. Well enough, she said, but less well than England, and less than Scotland which she also knew. But it was early days, and a countryside under storm and rain was not merry. It rained heavily still, pelting down on Abbeville towers and roofs and gables, and rushing in a flood through garbage-strewn runnels of the cobbled streets.

"Scotland?" Here was a link; he could never be dumb before the infectious music of that name. She knew Scotland? Yes, and had been at Holyrood, at Stirling, elsewhere, with Queen Margaret, own sister to the Lady Mary, and widow now of King James killed at Flodden Field. And she was more ready to like France since she had learnt French as a little girl at the Scottish Court, where her mother had been woman to Queen Margaret, having gone there from Richmond when King Henry the Seventh sent his daughter north to her luckless wedding. Some of the English maids had known nothing at all of France, and thought it a country where was no good living, but only frogs and snails, and where none ever washed, and there were no fine buildings—yet some were surely as fine as any in England or in Scotland——

"Not that," said Alec, loyally obstinate. "Finer than in Edinburgh none ever saw, and there are castles hidden by loch and sea, and churches and abbeys in islands—but France has fine cathedrals and castles and palaces, too," he admitted grudgingly.

"I am English," she said. "Or Cornish, which is nearly the same; my name is Jennifer Ennis. My father when he was a boy lived at Ennis, which is near Falmouth, but I have never been so far. Yet I loved Scotland and the Scots, and was heartily sorry for their plight, and have heard from Scottish gentlemen that France is also a fair and good land, though so different. . . . But now I must haste to my Lady."

Alec took her hand. "Woman," he said, "you have almost as much sense as a man, so I will give you a

warning. At the French Court have a care; the late Queen held it decently, and the King too is no bad fellow, even if I do not hold with this marriage—nor yet with any, for that matter—but there are young French cockerels about to be taken heed of, and the King's heir is among the worst. God's laws are naught to them."

"Sir, I thank you," she said, and made a half-mocking curtsey as she went. "But I can take care of myself well, for I am twenty-one in a month, and as for marriage, it has run in our family long enough for me to have respect for it."

Alec took shame to himself for even so much dalliance; but to his enormous bed at night, where the sprawling body of another great guardsman lay beside him, came a vision of a girl, dark, small, with soft, quick eyes that flamed suddenly, and a mouth sweet, but just a little obstinate and sulky. It was indiscreet for a ghostly woman to trouble his dreams.

§4

Glareanus, France's old master, spoke dismally to a crony, while they arranged the music to welcome Queen Mary, about the King's venture. There was, he said, a doctor of the ancients named Stratocles, a very aged man, who forswore all women, and hated them, and mocked them everywhere in vile terms. But he saw one day a certain laughing wench, one Myrilla, the daughter of Anticles, a gardener; and so longed after her that he shaved off his bushy beard, painted his face, curled his hair, wore a laurel crown to cover the shiny baldness of his pate, and for her love was ready to run mad. He, whom many men with knowledge of women had thought wise, thus made himself a laughing-stock for sake of one. In Italy, in his youth, the little, round, fussy musician had had many adventures, and knew how many snakes and eels went to one bag.

Louis, as Duke of Orleans and then as King, had never forsworn women, nor often hated them, though he had come very near hatred of his poor, hump-backed Jeanne. In his youth he had lived wildly. Now to the amazement of all he lost what was left of his old, big heart to this jolly, courageous, lovely and lovable Eng-

lish girl who had come through so many miseries and dangers to wed him, and meant to deal with him fairly. Rain and mud might spoil the pageantry; plumes might lose their gallant curl, garments be wet and soiled and draggled; but pleasant and desirable and vivacious and challenging she looked to him, riding her white palfrey so well, smiling under the shaggy hat cocked jauntily and provocatively over the left eye. Jennifer Ennis had tried to straighten it, but her mistress would have her whim.

But it was a little hat, soberly worn, in which she went to her wedding. There was a great assemblage in the saloon of the Palace at Abbeville; dignitaries, officials, solemn and glittering state. Francis of Angoulême was bridesman, and the Princess Claude her chief attendant when she went under the canopy. So fresh, so pretty was she that Francis kept his ambitious mother in a quiver of nerves by the attention he paid her, and narrowly escaped the anger of the King. Francis was young, gallant, unscrupulous, and had a way with women; he was handsome, and his magnificent dress set off all his advantage of youth and looks and carriage; even the very long nose, the thick chin, the long thin legs and stomach a little too protuberant did not make him anything but a dangerous foil to the elderly, gouty, broken man who was to wed her. Claude, in tears for her dead mother at her own wedding, had double cause now for tears. But the new Queen, if her eyes were quick for a presentable youth—and youth goes out to youth—had more sense than to jeopardize her position at the outset; remembering Brandon, too, her lover, she turned aside the importunities and slyer approaches of the young Prince with light banter and a snub not over-carefully concealed. She comported herself as a woman of far more than her sixteen years might have done, and won approval everywhere. Claude, missing her good mother so bitterly, and sad at the swift re-marriage, was won by her frankness and charm; she gave her a shy, grateful glance when she saw how the amorous dallyings of Francis (he was Duke of Valois now) were held in check, tactfully, without scenes. Francis had made a name for himself for his gallantries even in his early teens; at fifteen he had his

affairs; and if a woman had a husband the fact served to spice adventure. Claude had heard tales of a recent disgraceful amour; it was with the nineteen-year-old wife of a rich old advocate of Paris, whose wedding the Duke attended. The young wife of an old man was fair game to him. Not long after the wedding, he went to their house late one night, having already made secret love, and posted one of his gentlemen in the street to prevent interruption. The door was unfastened but a noise brought the husband, in bedgown and with taper in hand, down the stairs. Francis, assuming his most gracious and charming manner, apologized for so late and inopportune a visit, but said that he had been detained on his way to pay his respects to the married pair, and wished to drink a glass of wine to their health and prosperity. Flattered beyond measure, the old man called his wife to receive the heir to the throne; kneeling before him, she served the Prince with food and drink. While her husband went to a buffet to pour out more wine, the wife whispered to her royal lover to find some opportunity of staying in the house after he was supposed to have departed; there was a certain large wardrobe where he could hide till the old man slept, when she would be free. His host rose to see him out, but he protested that he would have no such service, and, on the wife offering to come to the door, checked and chid her, telling her to stay with her husband, and value him, because he was a man much valued by his King and Prince—of great repute in his business—and altogether a husband for any woman to treasure and be proud of. Then he slipped out, went noiselessly to the wardrobe, and hid himself; until the girl found it safe to join him.

This was one tale; and Claude, who loved her handsome and gay young husband in spite of his faults and follies, watched him and Mary with the lips of her overlarge and ugly mouth trembling, and played nervously with the great "A" brooch in diamonds Queen Anne had left her, which she always wore now in her mother's memory, and, seeing the wisdom and shrewdness of the English girl—full of life, yet not snared by surface glitter—was comforted and relieved.

When they were in Paris for the state entry, early in November, Mary won more than ever her husband's and Claude's hearts by a tiny, gracious act. Remembering her little step-daughter Renée, four years old, and, in a convent at Vincennes, shut from the feasts and jousts and junketings, the Queen sent from her table fruit and sweets and delicacies, and ordered for her puppets and pretty toys. Like her big, splendid brother Harry, now in his magnificent and golden youth on the English throne, Mary did thoroughly what she had set her heart to do.

But she had temper and will, like him also, and in the midst of the wedding festivities there began trouble. Louis from the first had been delighted with his young bride. After his placid home-life with Anne, he caught the infection of the girl's gaiety and youthful spirits; it seemed his own almost-forgotten youth was to be renewed; many years of life might still remain to him, and perhaps an heir be born, to keep the Valois Prince and his scheming mother from ruining the realm he loved so dearly. Who knew? He wrote to King Henry impulsively, expressing his joy at meeting his sister, his delight in her beauty and youth and high spirits, his complete satisfaction. But on the very morrow of the wedding he took a violent dislike to Lady Guildford —"Mother" Guildford, who was in charge of her regiment of women, and had been sent with the girl to be her guardian and adviser and guide. Mary liked her, and, in a strange land, very lonely and at loss now and then, found solace in her company, and that of the other English who had escorted her and were to have formed her household. But these English were difficult, arrogant, contemptuous or at least critical of French ways, and vigilant lest at the outset an English Princess should be robbed of the least tittle of her dignities and rights. There were stormy scenes of which the public, regaled with splendours, with conduits of flowing wine in the streets, with bands and banners and tapestries and artifices of fire—a hundred joyous diversions—knew nothing. In a first clash of wills, Louis, long practised in mastery, had his way. Mary wrote indignantly, her eyes red and smarting with angry tears, that her hus-

band was dismissing Lady Guildford, other of her women and maids, her Chamberlain, most of the Englishmen who had been sent with her to protect her and counsel her. Only those without experience and knowledge were to stay.

Louis wrote that he would have no interference; he and his wife must manage their affairs between themselves, and, dearly as he loved her, he would send her back rather than submit to dictation from Lady Guildford or anyone else. He would not be ruled by servants. He had his way; Mary had sense enough to yield gracefully at last, thinking no worse of her husband for his show of firmness; indeed, they were happier alone. He spared no pains to be kind, and the girl was grateful. A few of her women stayed with her; Jennifer Ennis, whose mother had served the English Queen of Scots, was one.

CHAPTER XVII MAY AND OCTOBER

"Fortune is a woman; she does not love old men."
THE EMPEROR CHARLES V.

§1

THE Count of St. Vallier went to Paris for the crowning at St. Denis and the festivities, taking his place by right of birth and office in the first rank of the French nobility. But France stayed in Dauphiny to guard his master's interests there. While her father was away Diane came from Moulins and stayed a week at St. Vallier; her youngest sister, Louise, was ailing, and had cried for her to come. Never ill herself, but keeping in perfect health by early rising, hard exercise, and the daily morning bath which excited much mild amusement at Moulins among her young companions (had not the holy virgin, Silvia, thought it wickedness to wash more than finger-tips?) Diane had small patience with illness in others, and less with doctors and their methods. Madame de Rancé, worried and fussy, had carefully blocked all air and almost all sunshine from the little sufferer's room; the child was screened by thick, dust-covered curtains, bled, dosed

with nauseous mixtures, blistered, tormented. Diane, coming in like a whirlwind of cool, clean, life-giving air, saw to it that the room was sweet and free from accumulated dirt, turned everything upside down, packed the doctors about their business, and in a few days Louise ate, slept, and played cheerfully with her toys. At Moulins the Duchess had insisted that every maid should know something of simple herbals, possets, cooling drinks, and homely medicines, and be able, whatever her rank, to cook plain food.

France and Diane, when her cool hand, bright and cheering talk and look, and matter-of-fact common sense had driven ill-health away, had time for many hours together. They spoke much of the King's wedding, which was now the talk of all the countryside, some folk approving, some speaking dubiously, some with as strong disapproval as they dared. Omens were proving false. Comets had flamed after Queen Anne's death, there had been celestial serpents and torches and balls of fire—yet the King not only lived but was well and merry. Messengers and a chance visitor or so, coming to St. Vallier, said that Louis was enchanted and already in chains of flowers. He could not do enough for his bride, now that her English had nearly all been sent back, and they were man and wife without outside intervention. It was marvellous how he had thrown off the years. He was proud to be seen in her company, proud that, so young and lovely as she was, she seemed happy with him, and was indubitably loyal. There had no doubt been difficult hours, but love and sacrifice on his part, liking (at the least) and some gratitude on hers, and good will on the part of both, had smoothed the first stage of their journey on a difficult and unknown road.

France, able to speak more freely to Diane than to his master (for St. Vallier would never hear a word against the King) was doubtful how all might end. Louis was thirty-eight years older than his bride; old enough to be her father; old enough, almost, to be her grandfather—indeed, there were men in the middle fifties who had grandchildren as old as she. Alec Maclean had written France a letter from Paris. The

young Scottish Archer could not write too openly, lest it should come to other eyes; but France read between the lines. There was one thing, in his uncouth French, he did set down as clearly as he could, without comment. Wits were beginning to say already in Paris (he wrote) that a certain old gentleman was so deep in love with a fine young English filly that he was like to be carried off full tilt to another world by her before many moons. To pleasure her Louis was already turning all his life and the life of the Court topsy-turvey. There were balls, pageants, banquets, processions, tournaments, huntings in the royal forests in an endless succession. He had been used to dine at eight, frugally; but now late hours were the order of the Court, and heavy eating and hard drinking (but then he always did like his wine). Rising later, he dined at noon; instead of being in bed by six, as he had often been in Queen Anne's time, he never retired now before midnight, and frequently much later; and then—they said—it was not to sleep. During his frequent bouts of illness the King had often spent days together in his bed-chamber, Anne nursing him, and attending to affairs of state. In these affairs Mary had no experience and could not help. Now, well or ill, he danced attendance on his wife, and had to snatch such time as he could for other and weighty matters. Pleasure came first. It was marvellous how, eager not to disappoint the girl, or confess age and weariness or distaste, he flung himself with vigour into such amusements as pleased her. With a pathetic generosity and kindliness, for the girl's sake he, an aged man if not in actual years, and ill, danced as though twenty or thirty years of life had fallen from him, ate rich dishes to excess and drank far too much, kept late hours, played as well as he might the youthful gallant and lover.

All this was well—or badly—begun when Alec's letter came. Alec made bold to say that a wife after all was but like a tin-can tied to a dog's tail, always a jangling worry; he thought a man a fool to tie such a thing on even once, but to be free of it and tie on another—and then another——! The Queen's English lover, Brandon, was the same kind of fool. France showed

Diane the letter, and they laughed over it together. But she defended the marriage. Romance and love, no doubt, were very pretty and pleasant; but there were other weightier things, and great folk might not please themselves. For the good of a Kingdom, for the linking of estates, for a handsome dowry, for a fine station in life, men and women married, by their own choice or that of guardians and parents, and did rightly. Such things lasted longer than passion, which was often gone in a night. And age did not matter. People were as old as they felt; as old as they allowed themselves to become or feel; she herself meant never, *never* to grow old. It was splendid of the King to play the youth, and not yield weakly to Time—Time, whom the Italians called a gentleman, when he is nothing but a thief and pocket-picker of health, looks, strength—everything.

France said that she was again talking nonsense. People must grow old; everyone must grow old. Only in Cathays of dreamland were elixirs of perpetual youth. He said nothing against King Louis, their good and great King, but this English girl—had she not a lover in England, and given him up for grandeur? Sold herself—or let herself be sold for a crown?

"Yes, but the crown of France!" said Diane, and her eyes flashed, and then, changing, seemed to look into a far and glittering distance. Her mood changed too. "You do not understand; but then, of course, how can you understand? I never see Madame without thinking: 'She ruled France once—she ruled all our glorious France!' And Queen Anne ruled Brittany; and, because she ruled her husband, ruled France also. Oh, I should like that. I would give everything to rule so great a Kingdom. And one might love too; there is no need not to keep one's love. The Princess Claude will never rule—even now, she cannot rule her husband—but I would rule him. Oh, I forgot to tell you, France, that Madame Claude is now with the Queen's household; they are very good friends; and my Madame Suzanne is to enter it also, they say. The Duke of Valois was at Moulins just before the Queen came over."

"Oh!" said France, and in the tone of the "Oh!" showed that he did not like the Duke over-much. Years

and years ago (in actual time it was not so very long) a little, wandering mountebank-boy, with his pet monkey, and a drunken clown whom he called "Papa," had been at Amboise; and, for his good jests and tumbling and songs had been flung a gold piece by this young Prince whose life now was a scandal to decent folk. Perhaps it was ungrateful, but France Caillette did not like the reminder of his low beginning and the largesse he had once taken so gladly. When Diane went on to speak of the Duke's looks and charm he was silent. He was still but her father's confidential secretary and clerk, yet able to speak fluently and correctly in the best French of Touraine—which is the best in France—to write an elegant hand, to quote or understand a phrase in Latin or a foreign tongue, to sing and make verse, to ride, fence, shoot, leap, dance. . . . No better could the greatest of the nobles do, and many not half so well. It irked him to hear and think of his superiors in rank at Moulins who gave themselves such airs, and even by their condescension showed they were quietly assured that others were of different clay. He and Diane had been so friendly, so intimate, in the old pacific years. Now all seemed changed even while seemingly the same.

He was more than a little jealous.

Diane watched him through her eyes of mystery and enigma for a few silent moments. She played with his jealousies. She liked the young Duke; he was amiable, friendly, had tastes coinciding with her own; poor Claude did not understand him, or know how to manage him, so drove him to other women. There were the wild companions of the Duke too—Chabot and the rest—and Bourbon's intimates who had served at the wars; young gentlemen also of the Moulins and Chantelle Court, very deferential and discreet when the sharp eye of Madame was on them, but France need not think they *always* went on bended knees when talking to the maids. She had few good words, but not many bad, of the girls and women. Her attitude towards most was of an icy detachment and reserve. She liked children, liked men; but was not greatly interested in women, except, of course, women who *did* things in the world,

and helped to rule it, either openly and directly, or secretly through the passions and weaknesses of men. There had been a Petticoat League in not very remote history; it was an age when clever women had their chances.

A wild, reckless, godless crowd, the younger nobles and courtiers at Moulins. France kept silent, but did not like to hear her speak of them with light approval. He tried to persuade himself that it was not really the stirring of jealousy that annoyed him. Yellow stockings were uncomfortable and silly wear—and fools of two sorts wore them.

Diane, still watching him, turned again to the subject of the young heir to the French throne, and to King Louis and his bride. She had been saying a good deal she did not herself think or believe, to watch its effect; but under surface-layers of thought was a motive to which the lad could not penetrate. Francis of Valois, she said now, was young, handsome, rich, of the highest rank, brilliantly gifted, active in manly exercises; he had all that could make a bridegroom desirable, a wife happy, a marriage successful. Claude was daughter of a great King and an even greater Queen; rich too, young too, gentle and loving and good and chaste. She was not beautiful—her mouth was too large, her chin was too pointed and sharp, and she did not know how to make the best of her looks; her fashion of parting her hair in the centre was hideous. There was a certain charm and attractiveness about her, however, of which, with more care for dress and the toilet, she might make some use. . . . There you had two young people, married, with almost every advantage in their favour. And they were not happy.

People were tutting about the King, an old man, twice a widower, gouty and ill and worn with life—and this fresh young bride who had come to him from England. But many of those who tutted had been married young, to young brides, and yet had been miserable. The King was satisfied and happy. The new Queen was grateful to him, liked him, admired him, enjoyed all the glittering delights he gave her to pleasure her—was, they said, growing rapidly fond of him. And so doleful omens and warnings were not always right.

She said suddenly: "France, if I were the Lady Mary, or if I were just myself, and King Louis were to marry me——"

"For his fourth wife?"

She laughed. "Or his twentieth. How many did King Solomon have, France? But the English King has had only one, and keeps to her. I shall be an old woman if King Louis asks me when his nineteenth is dead; though this is his third, and he but fifty-four. But no; I shall never be old, *never*." She dropped her voice, and whispered: "*Never, never, never.*"

France ignored this. He said: "Oh, you—you could never marry an old man and be happy, Diane. Besides, you are not a Princess."

"I am of the scarlet *noblesse* of the Dauphiny," she said with a momentary hauteur. But her voice changed instantly, and became gentle—very gentle. "Would you be sorry, France? We high-born folk have very often to do what we should not choose ourselves, and put a smiling face on it. I suppose I must marry soon; the Duchess, and my father too, say that I am more than old enough." She was silent again for quite a long time, and then said: "But would you be sorry, France? We have been very great friends, you and I. But you know *we* could never marry."

He said: "Once, though, Diane, you did say that a boy could do anything in the world he had a mind to, if he had gifts, and used them." In fancy he saw before himself a tall ladder and he climbing it; and high in rosy clouds above, Diane—the prize to be attained. But the ladder was very, very high; the climb, very, very difficult, and dangerous. Oh, there was so far to go. He was nothing more now than a clerk, a scribe in her father's service; why, it would be as bad as waiting to be King Louis's twentieth wife!

"I wish——" she said; and then again, "I wish——"

He thought she was going to say more. At a word of hope or encouragement—even the slightest—from Diane, the ladder lessened and faded, he had wings, the rosy clouds lowered and came close. Why, it was a world in which all was possible. Money-lenders,

peasants even, were Princes; poor bastards, some said, had been Popes; bootmakers' sons, tailors' sons, fish-hawkers, labouring lads, a plain country girl from the sheep-folds even, had been great generals and marshals, ruling cities and mastering kingdoms. Oh, the rosy clouds where Diane sat on a fleecy throne of gold and pearl were close indeed!

But Diane stood up suddenly. "No, I must do it," she said half to herself, and her small, white fists clenched. "Poor France, I am over-old already, though I am little more than child; they press me to wed, and have a man for me. Why, I would like to wait, but how can I? But it will not alter our love. Perhaps some day——"

"Who, Diane?" he asked, his mouth dry, his heart quickening and then seeming to stop; a dull, hopeless ache seemed to take its place.

"You shall see. You shall see him soon; indeed, I think you may have seen him. He is rich, powerful, accomplished, a great soldier, *most* highly-born."

"In time I may be all that—but one. And birth—oh, what is birth? One cannot help it. And yet some doubt whether I be not myself well-born. I can never know one way or the other. And is he—is he kind? And—and handsome?" The misty ladder rose again, and was so very high that Diane seemed far beyond reach and almost sight.

"Oh, he is very kind indeed; to me. And handsome——" She paused a moment, and an odd, inscrutable look played about eyes and mouth. "*Mon Dieu,* I have never seen a lover to equal him in looks. Never one. But you shall see."

"Diane, I will learn, work, fight! If you will only say no you cannot be *forced* to marry. Madame will not let you be forced."

"Madame? Why, France, you know she would have all the world wed young and handsomely, and it is Madame's own choice and wish——"

"The King, then. I will go to the King. Oh, I wish our good Queen Anne were still alive! But there is the young Queen, who is kind, they say, and was forced herself; she can twist King Louis round her

finger. Madame Suzanne will speak for us. And the Duke, our Charles Monsieur. Birth? That is something none of us can help, but all came from Duke Adam. I will haste to get famous and rich. Even if I am only France Caillette I need not be always; and they say my father gets on famously, and is already high in the royal favour. Did not Le Glorieux, the Burgundy Duke's jester, do great things for his friends?"

"Ah," she said, "but Le Glorieux could not bear women, and would do naught for them." She asked suddenly: "France, what happened when that great Duke Philip lost his hair?"

"Lost his hair? I do not know," asked France, very puzzled.

"All his nobles had to follow his example, and were shorn. They went bald as coots. Some of them came bald and shaven to France in old King Louis's time. I cannot go to King Louis and say——"

But what she could not say had to wait. Old Romain Maubert, grizzled and surly, came with word that someone waited in the outer court to see Monsieur the Secretary; a queer fish, come on a small grey mule, who would not take no for answer, though he was told that the Count's Secretary could not see any stranger without notice; an odd fish, for he swore by little fishes when he was rebuffed, and sent in his name as Monsieur Caillette's father. Like a little fish, France's heart flapped in his bosom. He looked helplessly at Diane. "Let him come," she said.

§2

So across the courtyard, and to the arbour in the garden where they talked—it was behind the ancient château, and looked towards the misty blue of the Vivarais—came Papa Caillette, beaming and bowing, on his own little legs, for the grey mule waited. He covered shyness with a blusterous coat of dignity and self-importance, making him more than ever ludicrous. The button nose was redder, the broad face pimpled with gross living. With the King's leave he had snatched a week or two to visit old friends; a crony, one of the

under-cooks at Loches, had travelled with him. And his first thought was for his boy, whom he had set so well on the high road to prosperity. Not to be thanked; oh, not to be thanked; France was welcome to everything his *bon Papa* had done for him at such a sacrifice. Filial gratitude, he knew, was a rare thing in the world; by the stomachs of a million little fishes! there were wise sons a-plenty who did not even know their fathers. He had been puzzled out of his senses by the cross-questioning there had been at Loches, until he no more knew who had begotten France, at the time, than who had nailed his ear to the post in the courtyard. But surely it must have been himself who nailed the ear, for a better day's work for him was never done in the world; and, by the Mass, no matter when it happened, he must somehow or other have begotten the son his wife had borne. "And how are you, boy, after these many moons? Come to your poor old father's breast, which has ached for you." His tiny, pig-like eyes had taken in Diane in a side-long glance; a great lady, young and fresh and lovely; *so*—— He jumped to conclusions; the lad and the girl had been very close. Now he glanced from France, reluctant in his warm and slobbering embrace, to the proud young girl—the Count's daughter, doubtless; and a fine match; he approved. "Bless you, my children," he said in a beaming glance, though not in words.

The enormous ears—the low, pock-marked brow—the face of blotched yellow putty—the little ruby nose—the wide, slack mouth—the grey stubble on the receding chin. . . . Oh, it was Papa; but Papa grown even more consequential and prosperous. The little protuberant stomach had grown rounder and more noticeable with excess of food. One did not dwell in a King's kitchens, or be the friend of a King's master-cook, for nothing.

Tears of delight rolled down the flaccid cheeks.

The little, quick, pig-eyes saw through mists all his environment, and pronounced it good. A fine old castle, surely but badly needing repair, and a mere nut-shell to vast Loches; a pretty garden and arbour though there were many better at Amboise and Blois, the mountains—pretty, though he himself would have had

them brought a trifle nearer, and less blue, and a little, perhaps, smoother in out-line; the Dauphiny might pass for a fair land, but was not comparable to Touraine, the fairest in all France. He gave another glance at Diane, standing ice-cold, her small mouth set in hauteur, her half-closed eyes inscrutable. A fine girl, surely, for his son to take. He would have liked to kiss her—had, perhaps, already a right; but . . . No, it was wiser not, just now. His small eyes ogled her.

France went hot and cold. Whatever Diane had heard or suspected of his origin, she could never have imagined this dreadful truth. Sodden with years of drink, odorous of stale potations, coarse of speech, Papa Caillette's effort to be agreeable (and firm conviction that he was being so) added to his nauseousness. And yet, for all the past miseries, hardships, chastisements and cruelties, the full horror of which the lad had not realized until he knew how much was better in the world, France was ashamed of being ashamed. They had once been companions. There had, now and then, been small kindnesses when these cost Papa nothing, or little. With prosperity, the King's Kitchen-Fool was even more smugly confident of his abilities and merit than before. He was absurdly content with the grotesque habit donned especially for his journey. It emphasized his oddities. The great ears projected beyond the edges of a plumed crimson hood; his cloak was vivid green, tufted with shabby miniver plucked from some merchant's discarded robe; his hose of faded rose were wrinkled and soiled above checkered stockings, yellow, green and mauve. An amazing mufti for a King's Fool on holiday. . . . He was proud of it, obviously, and blissfully unconscious that it lacked anything to fit him for the most exalted company in the world—a world, after all, ruled by Folly.

He took the flushing Secretary by the shoulders: "Why, lad, you have filled out finely; I knew I should some day make a man of you. Your old Papa is not ashamed of you, no, no; France, lad, he is proud. Mademoiselle, forgive a parent's weakness," and he mopped with a greasy purple handkerchief vast real tears (they always came easily) from his tiny, shifting

eyes. "Is he not the very spit of his father, whom a King delights to honour?"

Diane, icily cold, said: "Sir, I am glad to have seen you, and your son, who is now my father's servant, does your training credit. You will excuse me while I leave you together. There is another guest to be welcomed to-night, and I must make ready." She spoke to France now, turning a little, yet not looking at him, but in a manner over him or through him. She said freezingly: "There will be much you have to say to one another. Maubert can find your father lodging if he stays."

Papa gasped; pulled his enormous ears. "Pigs of St. Anthony!" he gasped, "a fine lass, to be sure, but too cold to my liking, France; too cold and stiff to my liking. And no more than a country bumpkin; she tries town airs on me; you will find better wives in Tours or Paris. I should give her the go-by, lad, if you are not gone too far with her. A bee may sip flowers and yet not eat them and be surfeited. . . . She talks like a King's daughter—and a real King's daughter has shown me better respect. I have often seen Madame Claude smile at my jests. And how Queen Mary laughed but the other night when I was had in to make them sport, at Loches where the King has taken her now; and Triboulet wept his eyes sore with jealousy because he could raise no flicker of a smile! I played at being an astrologer, 'twas a new wheeze of mine; I dreamt it when I fell asleep at Mass. 'Tis the incense and the mumble, I suppose, but at Mass (though I go but in a blue moon) I find most of my best notions come. I pricked a hole in an ass's ear in my new yellow cap, and pretended to find stars in it, and told them of all the wondrous marvels I saw. And I pretended to make gold for them, and an elixir of youth which I gulped myself (it was good Auxerre, really) so that I grew younger and younger; a portly burgher, a lusty lover, a boy, a puling babe nuzzling its mother's breast. And then I made up many adventures. I told them how once I had been unjustly accused of witchcrafts, and was up before an old judge. 'Fellow, do you deny you have seen the devil?' I made him ask, in a parched-acid voice. 'No, sir, nenny no,

I deny nothing, for I see him even now. He is wrinkled and old, and very ugly, and wears a square hat and a bib and a long miniver robe.' How they rolled and laughed! And then I told them how I prevented one great noble of the Court (I dared not say his name, but all knew it, and laughed) from going to Paris. 'Twas in a country wagon, and he smelt so abominably, that the passengers wished themselves well rid of him. 'Twas no way for a noble to travel, but he would steal a blind man's sou from his tin. So I pretended (but 'twas all invention, for no such thing happened) to tell fortunes on the way from the hand, but would not tell his, saying I feared greatly at what I saw in his palm. (They laughed at that, knowing it could be only dirt or bribes I saw.) And I said: 'Monseigneur, for I perceive you are a great lord, upon your life never enter Paris for a week of Sundays; I foresee cut-throats plotting round Montfaucon to kill you; and if you continue your death is certain, supposing these lines and little crosses true.' So I made him bundle out in a great fear. . . . That fellow Triboulet was green with envy, they laughed at me so much."

The past which France wished ended was not ended; it chained him still. Diane did not mention his father when they met next; perhaps he only imagined or suspected an added chillness in her manner towards him? Oh, she was very far away now, hopelessly and impossibly far away. All she had known of his beginnings had been vague; perhaps the thought that he had risen from nothing added romance to their friendship. It flattered her, assured her that she was generous, and not foolishly proud; reversing the old tale, a Princess loved the kitchen-lad. But here came solid, squalid reality, and surely the scarlet blood of Dauphiny, where pride soared highest, must find the ugly fact difficult to accept. Diane had a physical repulsion for anything ugly, grotesque, unclean. Nothing she touched must be soiled or other than pin-bright. Horses, dogs, falcons, must have breed; and surely the thought would dwell with her, when she saw France now: "Here is the stock from which he comes; can he be free from taint?" It was impossible to prove a nobler ancestry; Papa Cail-

lette himself, out of the royal presence and danger, went back on all he had said; France was still his boy, who owed him everything, and should be grateful.

A messenger had come in saying that the guest they expected was delayed on the road, and could not come until the morrow. Maubert, perplexed and flustered, had chosen a small chamber near France's own for his father, but Papa Caillette turned up his nose at it; 'twould do, but his room in Loches kitchens was better; in his den there he was warm, with victuals at easy beck and call, friends near him, turnspits and scullions to chuckle at every joke; oh, he was snug as a bug in a rug, at Loches. But the room would do at a pinch. He made it, in incredibly brief time, a sty. Wine spilled and soaked into the clean rushes; he spat aimlessly and at will, even on the fine old scriptural tapestry in saffron, bice and rose; gnawed bones, fragments of chewed bread, peel of onions, cheap and tawdry trinkets and charms bought on the road, soiled garments, a medley of nasty rubbish, littered the huches and armoires and bahuts, or were jumbled on the floor, or hung upon the costly candlesticks, or were tossed high on to the canopy of his bed. His clumsy foot crushed into splinters a glass of delicate Venice work which had survived generations of thumb-handed maids. Nausea of which Papa was blessedly unconscious overcame the young Secretary when he had to sit at the bed-edge and be slobberingly caressed, and was forced to listen to interminable, dreary talk. Threads of interest ran through this in relief. It seemed that the King and Queen had chosen to make their chief residence at Loches, though they made frequent progresses through the countryside and to Paris. There was fine hunting in the forest; Amboise was not quite so good, since the last King Louis had, in a spleen, despoiled it of most of its fine, ancient trees. His Majesty seemed happy with his new wife still, and she content; Papa had many bawdy jokes about them both. But the King (he said) sighed sometimes for Queen Anne, and was a-weary. The new Queen was very gay, impulsive, with a will of her own and a temper. The barrier of age was between them, which the King tried hard to bridge with kindliness and

humour. Men said, though, that omens and portents might not be so far wrong after all. It was early days. Louis was certainly not well. Of late he had frequently chosen to travel in litters instead of on his horse. At times he stayed in his chamber, swaddled almost to the thigh because of his gout, and looking like a sick owl. This could not last long.

For himself, Papa Caillette did not grumble. There were feasts, entertainments, dances, jousts, masques, on a scale of magnificence at which the old Queen, who knew the value of a livre tournois even when most generous, and looked for the worth of it, would have rolled her eyes in consternation. The King's Kitchen-Fool smacked his lips when he spoke of the provision that poured daily into the castle. Such wines, in butts huge enough to drown a regiment! Auxerre, which a saying had it was the drink of Kings; Aucoire, Soissons, old Turaçon, champagnes, Arbois, Château-Chalon, Tokays, Vins de Beaulne, red wines and golden from Italy, red wines and white from Germany, Greek wines, Spanish wines, wines of all kinds, in abundance. And food! His tiny eyes grew round and almost big, the slack mouth watered. Fine crumbs fell to the Fools'—and dogs'—table. Delicious Perigord patés, Médoc oysters, great sturgeons, turbot, lampreys from Nantes, herons spiced and sugared, and moistened with rose or orange water, dwarf herons, bitterns, swans, peacocks served with olives and capers, beans brought all the way from Windsor in England, pheasants, gelinottes, Genoa artichokes, Barbary cucumbers, sucking-pigs stuffed with chopped meats, damsons, herbs—the very tale of them made the mouth water. The parsley came from Italy, the butter from Vanvres, peaches from Corbeil, luscious pears from Lorraine, plums from the far south where they first ripened. There was a new dish just come from Italy—roebuck roasted whole, served with balm mint and fennel sauce which was too delicious for words.

Poor King Louis fared worse on all this than his Fool. Like some grey, old mouse in oxygen, the last of life was now burning rapidly and excitedly away. With Queen Anne he had jogged along so easily, so happily, along

accustomed ways. He thought of dear old habits, little private jests over which they smiled together, never tiring of their sameness; after ceremonies of state, he could don carpet slippers, fling off blue velvet and golden lilies, wear his quilted brown, grey stockings, black shoes, in comfort. This girl he had married never tired. She was young, affectionate, sweet to him; but flaring now and then into swift tempers when he knew no rest, but feet stamped down, doors slammed, costly things flung about him, tapestries snatched and torn down, dishes petulantly upset. . . . Charles Caillette only hinted at all this, but France put two and two together, and guessed. This poor, good, kindly King of theirs, the father of his people! Omens looked like proving true.

§3

On the next evening a gay company clattered into St. Vallier, and were met with ceremony by the Count de St. Vallier, Diane and her brother and little sisters, Romain Maubert, the upper servants, the guard. The Seneschal of Normandy had come to visit his old friends. He was dressed in garments easily worn, cut after the best fashion, of finest stuffs, but flung on negligently, and here and there creased and soiled, as a man might wear clothes who was indifferent to them, knowing his rank depended on no fine trimmings. A touch or two suggested that he had, impatiently, made some slight effort to regard convention. The plume was new, gold and blue, and curled most carefully; he had Spanish boots of a late pattern, beautifully embroidered; the horse's mane was parted in two long plaits, and tied with bows. But it was soldier and huntsman—brusque, masterful, not very polished—rather than courtier, who rode at the head of a splendid retinue through the grey, ancient gate of St. Vallier.

France, who stood by his master's side to welcome the new-comer, had seen him before—at Moulins, and in Paris. He rode the same magnificent black horse as at the hunt, and on the trappings everywhere, the colours a little faded, were the eight gold crosses on azure of De Brézé, or the "e, e, e," which was his punning badge. Romain Maubert in his gruff voice, which

cracked now and then, and wheezed now and then for breath, cried out his many titles. Monseigneur Louis de Brézé, Comte de Maulévrier, Baron de Bec-Créspin, Baron de Mauny, Seigneur de Nogent-le-Roi, Seigneur d'Anet, Seigneur de Brissa, Seigneur de Breval, Seigneur de Monchauvet, and Grand Seneschal of Normandy. . . . Splendid and resounding titles—borne by a man to whom, while fortune had been so generous, nature had been singularly unkind. He was somewhere in the middle fifties, but looked considerably older. The face was strong and determined, but plain almost to positive ugliness, and not made any the more handsome by a long, twisted seamed scar from some slashing wound in battle. A nose aquiline, slightly twisted, large for the face; a cleft chin; bushy brows, and hair in short, greying curls; a mouth hinting at cruelty, and with sarcasm always lurking at its corners. His eyes, blood-shot, stood out from their sockets. The neck sagged, and was deeply wrinkled; the jowls were pendulous. His movements were abrupt, jerky, authoritative and brusquely domineering. He spoke in a harsh, rough voice, using few words. His body was heavily built, short, but the trunk too long for the legs, which were thin and coarse and ungainly. When he dismounted he did so stiffly, and there was a slight lameness in one foot.

And Louis de Brézé, Grand Seneschal of Normandy, Captain of two hundred of the King's gentlemen-at-arms, kinsman of King Louis, Lord of many towns and hamlets and castles, cousin of Madame La Grande, was a hunchback.

It did not show so much in the saddle as when he stood or walked. . . . No one, even stealthily, would have dared to finger the Grand Seneschal's hump for luck, or, touching it, would have lived to do it twice. His blood at least was blue as any in France—a great house, his, come originally from Varenne long ago, and linked with the Du Guesclins and the great Constable, and later even with royalty. His father, Pierre de Brézé, had married Charlotte de France, natural daughter of Charles VII and Agnès Sorel. This was an old romance, ending in a tragedy which had nearly wrecked the fortunes of the

family. Pierre had found his wife with Louis de Lavergne, his master of the horse, and had stabbed her to death with his sword in the bed she had defiled. He had been condemned to death, but pardoned after the forfeit of all his goods, and the payment of a hundred thousand gold crowns to the King. Louis XI gave back his estates to his son, the hunchback to whom St. Vallier was now playing the obsequious host. It was said that his father had obtained this favour in return for supplying the King with white greyhounds and other hunting dogs of pedigree; the Brézé-Maulévriers had always been famous huntsmen, and the "Trésor de Venerie" was illustrated with a portrait of Jehan, the grandfather of Louis de Brézé, in his hunting costume, as the most notable follower of hounds in his day. Pierre de Brézé, who had risked everything, and lost everything save life for his revenge on a faithless wife, had been a brave and gallant soldier in his day, a great master of venery like his father, friend and companion of Dunois, and a poet of some small fame. He had been sent to aid Margaret of Anjou at Alnwick during the struggle between Lancaster and York, and had met his death very valiantly, at Montlhery.

The son of this man, Louis de Brézé—hideous, deformed, coarse of build, haughty nevertheless—stood in the courtyard of St. Vallier, and in Diane's small white hands was a cup of welcome. She was dressed simply as she always chose to be, in white and silver. She responded gravely and demurely to his rude courtesies. Very young, very fresh, very lovely she was; the long, narrow eyes narrowed just a little more, and were inscrutable, as she greeted her father's guest.

In the crowd of servants and vassals drawn up to receive him stood, in the background, Papa Caillette, his face like a yellow, spotted moon on which great ears had been clapped. But Louis de Brézé took small notice of any but St. Vallier and Diane.

His fine black horse, with its magnificent but slightly faded trappings, and braided and plaited mane, was led to the stables, Maubert following the ostlers, and Louis himself walked stiffly after them, the hump now very conspicuous, to see it safely housed and fed after its journey. Horses and dogs were more to him than men

and women; he made a slight, gruff apology to his host, whom he rejoined a few minutes later. To France, bending before him, he had given only the curtest greeting when St. Vallier introduced him as his Secretary.

Papa Caillette knew all about De Brézé and his ancestry, as he knew all about everyone (and more than some knew themselves). A very great gentleman, this, he said to France; rich, powerful and famous; the boy would do well to cultivate him. One should always have as many strings as possible to one's bow. France reminded him, a little irritably, of the old proverb, that with one string to the bow the target was always more easily hit. Papa would not have it. France, though he had done so very well, was still young, and wiser heads sat always on older shoulders. As for Papa, he was too wisely old a bird to neglect any good chance. His ambition was to be, one day, *fou-en-titre* to the King, and the more friends at Court the better to help him cut out Triboulet. One could not stay mere Kitchen-Fool all one's days, like a pullet stuck all of a shape in its iron-cooking cage in the great fire-place at Loches. No. Already France discovered to his annoyance, Caillette had wheedled Romain Maubert—whom he told that it would be a service to the Secretary—into asking the Count to let the King's Kitchen-Fool amuse the distinguished guest after supper; and Monseigneur had consented. "By the stomachs of fifty whales," said Papa, "I will tickle their ribs for them, France lad, and 'twill surely be a good turn for you too if I let them know what a father you have at Court. Those famous white greyhounds my Lord de Brézé sets such store on would be nothing without ancestry—never a good hawk but came of good stock. Trust your old father, boy."

But France had little time for talk, as little, indeed, as he had inclination; his master was taking the Grand Seneschal over his estate, and France, who knew the tale of every métre of land on it, and every mill and cottage, and the name and breed of every dog and horse and bird, must go with them. The Seneschal had few words for him; a shrewd question rapped out now and then; not much else. He was too great a lord to take overmuch notice of his friend's Secretary.

" Combien de fois je me suis souhaite
D'avoir Diane, pour ma seule maîtresse."

HENRI II OF FRANCE.

§ 1

IN the hall at St. Vallier, where, between tapestries and hunting trophies and arms, the dark portraits of forgotten Dauphins of the Viennois, of long-dead Burgundy Counts, of Marquises de Cretone and Counts of Valentinois and of St. Vallier, looked down with lifeless eyes, the Grand Seneschal of Normandy sat at the dais with his host, and Diane next him. Romain Maubert stood behind his master; France at a trestled table near at hand. As always at St. Vallier, old blended with new, the magnificent with the tawdry and the mean. Some of the tapestries were patched, some frayed and rat-bitten; others had not long come from the looms, and their garish colouring contrasted strangely with those that had hung for long years on the walls, or been brought out of hiding in store-rooms. All night and all day cooks and scullions had been busy. There was rich and ample fare, though St. Vallier made elaborate apologies to his guest; in the remote countryside one could not hope to emulate Moulins, Chantelle, Blois, or Anet. " Oh, we keep simple house at Anet, my lord," said De Brézé gruffly. " I do not come to see my friends for their meat and wine. At the board is something of more import than those," and France, catching the exchange of words, caught also an exchange of looks, in which there seemed something secret, guarded, in a way defensive on both sides. It was the look men bargaining in a market, suspicious of each other, yet feigning friendliness, exchange. Host and guest were old soldiers, skilled in valuing loot; both shrewd men of affairs, avid of more wealth, though each had ample; and it seemed to the on-looker, calm outwardly, but noting everything, that something of worth was being priced, sold, bought. He could not guess what; land, perhaps, a hawk, a leash of hounds. Nor could he tell why such uneasiness of spirit vexed him. He was not

pleased, indeed, that his father was to make merry for these lords, and Diane's manner (but then she was occupied with the guest) troubled him; since his father had come it had seemed to him, perhaps wrongly, that their comradeship was over; his obscure or mean birth had been brought home to her. Even now he fancied that she glanced from him to his toss-pot father whose every word and smallest action must be an offence to a girl so sensitive to beauty and ugliness. He tried to catch her eye, but she steadily evaded his glance. In her face he could read nothing clearly. It was a face seen darkly, in a glass. She was very pale; her white skin had an added pallor, and even her carnation lips, to which she never added any touch of colour (hating dissemblements like this) had paled and were almost bloodless. For the first time he noted a tiny puckering—very, very tiny—of the narrow brow which had been smooth as any marble of Carrara. No, she would not look, and had no word for him, even when he passed close to her at a summons from St. Vallier to decide some trifle which was in courteous dispute between the two noblemen. She spoke often to De Brézé, who answered her with a rough, soldierly gallantry. But then, her mother being dead, she played hostess for her father, and played it daintily and sweetly and well.

Over wine and comfits, the company listened to such entertainment as was now offered. A boy from the village sang, very beautifully and clearly, to a lute. One of the gentlemen-pensioners told a few bawdy tales of Italy, mimicking contadini, soldiers, light women, a priest—but here he was checked, for the Curé of St. Vallier was of the company, a testy man, jealous of his cloth. And then—Charles Caillette, Kitchen-Fool to his Majesty the King of France. . . . Papa had brought belled eared cap and bauble and bagpipe in his kit. He stood in the light of stubby candles set in low, square candlesticks; a splash of crude colourings, red, green, yellow; the yellow light fell full on his pimpled face, red button nose, vast ears, slack and slobbering mouth. Already he was half-drunk, and ready to be more so. He began with a bow which almost overbalanced him; then prefaced his fooling with a solemn speech even more foolish. He oozed

self-importance. It was no mean jester, he let them know in almost as many plain words, they saw before them, but one who, diligent in his business, an honourable business and an ancient, had stood before Kings. But first he felt overwhelmed that his son (and at this a stubby finger shot out at France) followed already in his footsteps. Train up a child in the way he should go, said King Solomon, and when he is still young he will not depart from it until he sees something better; so, or somehow like it, spake King Solomon. His boy had been well-trained, and did credit to his training, and—there he was. . . . If all might not hope to serve Kings—and King Louis (he doffed the belled cap) was the best of masters—the next best thing was to be in the service of a nobleman so great, so widely honoured, as Monseigneur the Count of St. Vallier, their illustrious host. He drank to his lordship's health. He drank to the health of his illustrious lordship's illustrious guest, Monseigneur the Grand Seneschal. He would drink, had he wine left in his goblet, to the distinguished healths of all present—whereupon St. Vallier motioned a servant towards him, to give him wine enough for a comprehensive, gulping toast, since, the Count said dryly, time would not serve for individual healths.

And then Papa Caillette paid what he thought one of the subtlest and most graceful compliments of his life, glancing first at France and then at Diane for approval. "Since that may not be, my lord, time—as you so wisely say—not serving—I drink——"

He paused a moment, and balanced himself against the board, for already he began to see two St. Valliers, two De Brézés, two Dianes, two Frances, and innumerable duplicates of misty faces in the candlelight. "I drink—to Mademoiselle Diane de Poitiers, and to the happy youth who wins or has won her love. Prosperity and long life to them both!"

France was scarlet to the ear-tips. He had dreaded some such incident as at Loches before the King, when Papa had called him out to serve as acolyte, with Lisette, to help in his buffoonery. . . . Acolyte to a drunken Fool . . . before Diane! Yet this, coming like a thunderclap, was worse a thousand times. He hardly

dared to glance now at the girl's face. But he did glance; Diane gave not the faintest sign of interest, of understanding, unless just a flicker of the eyes as they now met his for a fraction of a second meant interest, meant understanding. But how pale she was.

The Count de St. Vallier, kindly always but quick-tempered and given to free speech, rapped out a tremendous oath, his face flushed and angry. "Take the Fool away," he said to Maubert, "this is intolerable license. I had not known he was so drunk already." He turned to De Brézé with apologies. But his guest gave a short laugh, almost like a cough: "Oh, Fools have always license," he said. "My lord, 'tis nothing; even if he knows aught from Court gossip, my skin is none so thin. Let us all take his cue, and drink to Mademoiselle, and then have him end his speech, and amuse us with his fooling."

So all the company rose, the highest and the low, and drank to Diane. But France was more perturbed now by what had passed—imagined this, imagined that—was furious, miserable, vaguely uneasy at something he could not understand. He drank mechanically with the rest, but looked no more at Diane, and his goblet-rim was scarcely more than touched by his lips.

Papa's entertainment followed; the old jests mainly, drawn for the most part from the old, tattered book, and ancient as Adam; but a few new ones of his own inventing. He saw somehow that he had made a false step. This Diane was proud; as he had told France, there were —by the stomachs of a million little fishes—a million female fishes in the world as good as she, or better, for the hook of a likely lad to catch. But it was clear to him that France and she loved one another; hadn't he, once, loved the boy's mother, well enough to gulp down awkward matters? It was better not to dwell on that dim story which had nearly lost him his head at Loches. He rattled on now, cracking his jests, taking off great personages, doing his mimicries, singing his songs, playing his pipes, performing (as well as he could—the wine was heady) his shuffling dances. He wished he had his boy to help him, but felt instinctively that it was better not—better perhaps not even to ask for Lisette's aid. Poor

Lisette had been somewhat neglected lately, but Papa, whom the monkey never liked, had spent much of his time with her, giving her dainties, attempting to teach her new tricks and brush up her memory of old. She spat and sulked, remembering other things in the old days than her tricks.

Once and once only he trod again on dangerous ground. He had been taking off certain local characters he had noticed, in the castle, in the streets, in the tiny market of St. Vallier where he had spent an hour or two in the forenoon. Romain Maubert had been imitated to the life, and joined gruffly in the laughter without knowing that it was turned against himself. A man does not always recognize himself in caricature so easily as his enemies or neighbours. Charles Caillette was shrewd, observant, had very fair gifts under his flamboyant and enormous self-conceit. In the market he had seen Madame de Rancé making some private purchases; he imitated her asking the price of fish, raising her hands with horror when it was named by the fish-wife, beating the vendor down, carrying off her fish in triumph. And then a growing, uneasy realization of a smell behind her; suspicious glances cast round at the malodorous, garlic-breathed country-folk; her nose delicately held and pinched between her high-born fingers; sudden, startled realization that the smell came from her own basket; a hurried return to the fish-stall, and hot interchange of words; in the midst of the dispute a cat settling the whole matter by carrying off the fish. It was a new inspiration, which would, with the central figure changed (whom should he choose?), amuse them at Loches; his friend the master-cook would go into fits over it. Stomachs of all the fishes in the world, his wit was still as bright as a new bauble, even if he aged. . . . He had invented, too, a little girl's remark to a small friend on her betrothal: "Papa and Mama have found me a husband at last. I saw him for the first time yesterday. But oh, Typhaine, he is such a little husband. We shall love each other very much, I am sure, because our Papas and Mamas have told us to do so, and they are so pleased that we love each other passionately. Only, what a funny little husband they have

chosen for me; he is not much bigger than I am myself."

There were only a few titters at this. The Count de St. Vallier's ringed, hairy hand moved restlessly on the board; he had not particularly wanted to marry Jeanne de Baftarnay, though they had rubbed along fairly well together, and she had done her duty by bearing him a boy and three girls. His mind played already with the idea of another marriage; poor Madame de Rancé was quite impossible, of course, and hardly entered his mind —a dead love story, with the lavender that had scented it grown very stale; it was Françoise de Chabannes his thoughts dwelt upon. (They were married in a year.) But first—there was Diane to be settled.

§2

In the morning the hall was stale with the fumes and dregs of the banquet; by daylight the decorations, still in their places, looked very tawdry against pure sunlight; the stubby candles had melted over the squat silver sticks; spilled wine was everywhere, and among straw and rushes at the lower end of the hall, where some of the servants and poorer sort had slept, was vomit, spittle, filth. There was filth also on the new, fine carpet; some of the more important guests, who had come from neighbouring châteaux, were little better than peasants in their manners, even though they boasted of belonging to the scarlet *noblesse*. France entered the hall quite early to find a parchment he had taken in to the banquet, and had forgotten. But Diane was up before him. She always liked to rise before the world was astir. He heard the clatter of her white palfrey's little hoofs on the courtyard stones; she came into the hall. No doubt she had ridden far into the Vivarais already, and the fresh, mountain air, the hard exercise of the saddle, had apparently done their work; her pallor was gone. But when he looked more closely he saw to his amazement that her colour was not given by nature. Yet she had been contemptuous of women who used artificial aids to beauty. She had not been able to conceal dark circles under the enigmatic eyes.

Diane greeted him with a touch of the icy hauteur which he had noticed, or thought he noticed, since his

father had come to St. Vallier. But she stopped suddenly, after she had said good morning, and had turned away. "France," she said, almost in a whisper, "what do you think of the little husband Madame and my father have chosen for me? We shall love each other very much, I am sure, because Madame and Papa tell me we shall. But is he not—a—funny little husband? I am a lucky girl, and, oh, we shall be so happy. He is very rich, and very great, and I shall be Madame La Grant' Sénéchalle of Normandy. By and by, when we are married, I may go into Madame Claude's household, or perhaps even Queen Mary's. But at Rouen I shall be like a Princess or a Queen myself. He is not really very much older than I; not forty years, I think. He tells me, when we are married, there will be splendid fêtes for me at Rouen, and then perhaps we shall go for the hunting to Mauny, where there are splendid stags to be brought down. And of course there is his castle at Anet. I have never been there yet, but he is never tired of talking to me about it, and how beautiful it is, and how fine the stables and kennels are. I love horses and hounds, and birds. I have told him I shall make his home even more beautiful, and he laughs, and says I may try. Oh, is he not a dear little husband Madame and my good Papa have chosen? Monseigneur the Duke of Bourbon, your friend, is our very good friend, too; he and my father and my lover are all old comrades-in-arms. Very likely we shall be married in the Palais Bourbon, in Paris. I don't know yet. France, you have not said you are glad, or wished me good fortune." For all the lightness of her speech, her eyes were glistening, and it was not with the brightness of morning. France gulped, and could not speak. He wanted to say a hundred things, but could not. He wanted to plead, to urge, to command even, to tell her—oh, a thousand things; but only a few almost incoherent, angry, pitiful words came. There was silence between them then. She touched his hand lightly—his cheek; a butterfly touch, so light it was. "France, you know the pact we made; the pact made long ago, in the romance days, by the boy and girl, which, when they were fully grown, they brought before the Court of

Love. You may kiss me if you like, and I will give you back your kiss, so that no one may complain of it."

"When is it to be, Diane?" he gasped out.

"Very soon, I think. . . . But France, dear, I am waiting still for my kiss. Do you not *want* me to be happy?"

"I want you to be happy—yes, Diane. But I do not want to kiss you."

He looked at her; a sigh rose and was stifled; he held himself in firm control. Suddenly he gave her a slight bow, and turned to go. She cried out: "France, *France!*" and made an impulsive step to follow him; then, changing her mind, flung herself on a settle. It seemed that he heard crying; not loud, but very soft and subdued—perhaps it was fancy. He certainly heard, in an undertone not, perhaps, meant for him to hear (but women are so strange): "Oh, France, I wish my mother had not died; I wish my dear little mother had not died. Life is so difficult." He passed on through the hall with its stale glories, not turning his head, or pausing. He wanted the open air, the wide world, the lonely road, the wide, desolate open spaces, the heath, the wind. In the courtyard he called a stable-boy, and told him to saddle his horse. But before it was ready Maubert came up; Monseigneur the Count wanted him in the business room, and when he went there were documents to be drawn up. It seemed that now there need be no secrecy; he understood at last much that had been kept even from him, even on their visit to Paris, the incidents and interviews that had taken place becoming strangely and suddenly intelligible. On the parchments, in their crabbed, tortuitous phrasings, were names of estates, of parcels of smaller ground, and mention of moneys and goods. All were very detailed, and he knew that it was his work to set down the price at which Diane had been sold, and bought. His master did not seem anxious to meet his eye. The Grand Seneschal entered after half an hour, and soon France was dismissed, to leave the gentlemen closeted together. There had been a little final haggling about an old post-mill near Sérignan, where the Count owned an ancient castle. How sordid all was!

At last, fuming with impotent anger and resentment,

he was free. He went to his own little room, caught up Lisette, overjoyed at sudden notice after long negligence, buried his face in her soft grey fur, and the broken sigh came again and found relief; but he could not cry. Never to have Diane—never, *never;* however long they lived, however high he rose in the world! Unless, of course—— But he had no mind for dead men's shoes, or for taking what another had done with. Why did she accept so meekly? She was not a slave; and even a slave in the Grand Turk's markets might complain, and grumble, and protest. She had been moved; there was real misery in that half-whispered cry he had overheard: "Oh, I wish my mother had not died; I wish my dear little mother had not died!" Perhaps Jeanne de Baftarnay, whose lands were now joined to those of St. Vallier, had told Diane in a moment of weak confidence how she herself had been sold and bought. Diane had asked for the kiss which he had refused to give, yet he felt uneasily that her misery was not rooted very deeply. She was not too sad to blend with her thoughts the fêtes and splendours of Rouen, the Court, Anet; the huntings at Mauny; the hounds and horses and hawks. Why, to-day, had she painted lips and cheeks for the first time since he had known her? Why, last night, if she was indignant at this marriage, had she been so sweet and gracious and humble to De Brézé?

He hugged Lisette, fondled her, and at last tears did fall among her grey fur. Here was part of his real self; part of a jester's little tumbling and singing boy, almost illiterate, often starved, often beaten and unhappy, often *sou*-less and ragged in shabby gabardine. All the rest —the notice taken of him at Loches, the friendship of Bourbon, the life at St. Vallier and Diane's charming and pretty comradeship—his new accomplishments, ambitions, dreams—were shams, mockeries, unreal and passing. He had slept, and dreamed, and was awake.

Still cuddling Lisette, he went again to the stables where the tall bay mare he had so often ridden with Diane was saddled and waiting. He attached Lisette's little gilded chain to his doublet, and held her in the crook of his arm, tightly, as he mounted. Sometimes

he had carried her on his stretched-out arm when he rode, as ladies would carry hawks at arm's-length on their gloved hands; she would cling tenaciously, gibbering at passers; no jolting of rough mountain path would dislodge her. . . . But he himself was dislodged by the jolting of life's rough path. . . . He rode out through the back gate of the castle which opened on the free countryside.

There was a tiny heathy plateau he knew, with an amphitheatre of blue heights for background; here he and Diane, long ago—not so long ago—had often flung themselves down after the steep climb, and had looked upwards together at the high skies, blue and white overhead; and seen in the fleecy, moving, changing clouds, castles with battlements, islands, gallant ships sailing to havens, figures of beasts and men. Once they had heard the "*cree, cree, cree,*" of young eagles essaying their early flights from the eyrie among hidden crags; a sound very, very desolate, isolating them all the more from the busy world below them. One could breathe here. One was free here. It was strange that the devil should have chosen, he had said once to Diane, a mountain on which to tempt Our Lord with the glittering kingdoms of earth. Here they were nothing. "*The devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them; and saith unto him: 'All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.'*" The kingdoms of the world and the glory of them! The eternal silences heard not earthly voices, trumpetings, clash of arms, sonorous, high-sounding titles shouted by heralds. The everlasting hills, looking down on earth's small pageantry, saw Kings and Courts and Pomps and Tyrannies fade to dust, and troubled not even to smile. Here in the loneliness were indifference and peace.

Yet—and yet—every word Diane and he had spoken here, every innocent kiss given and received, every trifling pretty movement, came back to him. Memories of their friendship thronged and thronged. It was over; he must forget. Now he played with cloistral thoughts—but Lisette's shrewd little wrinkled face peered curiously into his, and a gentle paw, the claws

sheathed that could scratch so swiftly, rested inquisitively on his hand. He laughed. "Ah, Lisette, we at least are friends. Here are no harms, no subtlety of men, no deceits, no sale and barter of life. Shall it be the cloister, then? There is a monkey carved from oak in a church we know, and it wears the cowl and frock. No; I should make no good religious." But he loved St. Francis, whom Queen Anne and her kind Confessor had loved so dearly; the mad desire had crossed his mind to strip himself of all, to wander free as air, to have no heed at all of women, since a maid had found the world too strong for the keeping of love. But there were feats of arms. If war came again, Bourbon might befriend him and give him a chance of forgetting—in life, even in death. He cared little now, with this great ache at his heart, whether it were death or life.

But the country was at peace; a girl had been sold and bought to bring that about. Queen Mary for a realm's good; Diane for the merging and enrichment of two great houses. De Brézé was only copying his master in his smaller way. When the Burgundy Duke lost his hair, all his courtiers had to go shaven; it was the way of Princes to set fashion.

A beating and fluster and flapping of heavy pinions —a shadow on the heath, and pouncing, beaked, embodied peril—France woke from dreams, and stumbled to his feet. Lisette, tired of his musings and forgetfulness, had wandered towards the grazing horse, dragging after her the tiny gilded chain. She screamed like a human being in mortal agony. High and higher the eagle rose with its shrieking prey. France shouted, looked around for a cudgel—but there was none—for a stone, and there were many, but he threw vainly.

Impotent to help, he saw the dark form mount, and mount, and mount; a little gilded chain dangled, and was soon invisible. But the talons had to relinquish their fiercely clutched prey; Lisette's poor little grey body crashed in shapeless pulp among the rocks.

§3

France rode slowly on the tall bay back into St. Vallier. He was dazed at this new disaster. The

strongest link with the old life was snapped—and the happiest; just as, with the loss of Diane, the new life dawning so brightly had come to disaster. No one cared now; even the monkey, that loved him in its odd, grotesque fashion, was gone. He was alone.

He had buried his little pet in a scraped-out grave among heather, and piled stones above its grave. Was it wrong to pray for a beast that had been true, gentle to him, affectionate, playful, on the defence against his enemies? In her tempers, swift fits of spite, clever mimicries, quick, cunning glances, Lisette had been only a little less human than humans he had known. A small caricature; and it had seemed to France sometimes that God, making man in His image, had made the ape in the image of man, to teach him humility, to show him his pettinesses and absurdities which, overcome, might help him to rise nearer to the true shape of his Maker. He had pored over the bestiaries at Loches and in the great Library at Moulins. Each small beast and bird, reptile and insect, was an allegory, but each had also its individuality, its part to play either well or ill in the world, as man had himself. Poor little Lisette had played her part none so badly; at least she had cheered and made gay the heart of a lonely, unhappy boy.

He had heard there were animals in heaven—Balaam's ass that spoke was one. France had knelt by the little pile of mountain stones, and muttered a prayer for his small dead friend.

In a maze he came back through the grey old gateway into the Château. Sunshine fell in bands moted with dust on the court, but all sun had gone from his life; St. Vallier was strangely cold, and desolate, and empty. It was Diane who had been its real sun to him, the scent of its flowers, the sparkle of the Galaure waters, the colour of its banner bearing the besants argent on azure which flew from the topmost turret of the castle. It was Lisette to whom, when miserable and hopeless, angry and self-abashed, he had turned for diversion and solace.

His father came stumbling across the court, a bizarre figure, unwholesome, his speech thick and uncertain after the night's potations. He must get on his road,

he said; he had not meant to do more than see his lad. There were other friends he had to visit; Madame Belatte at Montbazon, the good-natured inn-wife who had now added another chin to her five, was one; she was fatter than ever. Her tiny husband had died lately —so small a man, observed Papa, that he would be lost in Abraham's (he said Absalom's) bosom if he reached it, though that bosom could seem no very strange refuge after the scarcely less expansive bosom of Madame. A good woman, who had mothered their twenty children and other children not her own besides; and she had the inn still, and was left very snug. Papa must go and console her. He had been lately in more than half a mind to settle down again. Fooling for great folks had its drawbacks; last night, for instance (but then he knew finer people than these vain St. Valliers and proud De Brézés) his best jokes had gone almost unapplauded and unlaughed at. The King was good and generous, but poor King Louis would never make old bones. His young Queen wore him out. All that kept Charles Caillette in the royal service now—or nearly all—was his friendship with the Master-Cook, and his anxiety that a common, clumsy Fool like Triboulet should not outrival him. He gave France, as always, paternal and pious counsel, a little maudlin, it is true. Let him beware in telling friends from enemies. Let him not pay too much heed to fame, and life's good things. They were hollow as a jester's bauble; full of wind in the end, as a jester's pipes. That haughty young beauty valued herself too highly; France should be careful not to commit himself too far; his father was wiser and older than he, more versed in the ways of women; his counsel was to be non-committal with Diane, to steel himself against allurements, to make very sure before he took her that he could not do better. Papa, liking her at first, saw now a good deal in the girl he could not heartily approve or admire. Was there much prospect at St. Vallier?

It was his intention, he said, to start on his return journey to Touraine, travelling easily, and circuitously, the next day. He might perhaps pay his devoirs at some shrines; just as well to keep a holy saint or so in

mind, and have them for friends, life being so uncertain and so vexed. He began to feel his age a little, he said with pathos. It was wise to be ready for more worlds than one. His friend the under-cook was a good fellow; if Papa felt well enough, they would have a lively and pleasant journey; between them they knew all the best inns, the bawdiest girl-houses. When one enjoyed oneself a little, it was as well not to forget a saint or two. After that, perhaps—but he would see—Papa might really settle down. A virtuous wife, said Dan Solomon, was above rubies. Godliness with contentment was great gain, and if one were cosily married to Madame Belatte one might play patriarch—a score of children round one that one had not had the trouble of making or bringing up; a wife; in more ways than one, equal to another man's half-dozen.

He certainly meant to see Madame Belatte, and in any case no harm could be done; 'twas well, if the King died prematurely, or things went wrong at Loches, to have another string to one's bow. "And that, lad," he continued in his thick, unpleasant speech, interspersed as usual with great oaths and some ear-tugging, "is what I ever had in mind in training you and giving you your chance in the world. With your dancing, your songs, the jests and stories I have taught you, the tumbling I have whipped and coaxed you into—and (though, to be sure, monkeys do not live for ever) Lisette to play her part—'tis why I left Lisette to you——"

He had forgotten the long-ago journey to the seaboard, when France, a tiny boy, had seen a gallant ship with painted beasts on her sails on blue water, under blue sky, beyond coarse grass and yellow sand-dunes, and at their inn a drunken sailor had sold Lisette to France literally for a song. France remembered.

His father was amazed, staggered, furious when he heard of the morning tragedy. All her training wasted; all her tricks gone—in a flash the work of years; never was monkey so clever; he might have had her at Loches, but for his generosity to France; he might have sold her to some great noble for a bag of crowns, so clever she was. . . . His oaths were reminiscent of old years; he would have struck the Secretary, but a look

in France's eyes told him that those old days had gone. And then, his mood changing as swiftly as it often would when he was in drink, he found a comparison with Ganyemede which tickled him vastly. Lisette snatched up by Jove! There were Leo, Cancer, Capricorn, Ursus—he thought Ursus, the Bear—in the high heavens ruling the destinies of men—and now had a monkey joined them? Lisette would surely be friendly to the fortunes of her old companions.

He shambled off, chuckling at his merry invention, which might make good sport for the King some lucky night; waving good-bye, he said he would see his son anon, and they ride together early on the morrow to the cross-roads. And so, soon after dawn, Papa Caillette, on his little grey mule and in his amazing mufti, with a great bundle on the back of his steed, and his cloak-bag packed to overflowing—like some enormous pudding bulged with plums and apples—and France on the big-boned bay rode to a juncture of roads some brief way from St. Vallier, and said farewell, and parted. The under-cook was waiting at the first village. Papa was to take the old Domitian Way along which Roman legions had tramped. On life's high-roads folks of many motleys travel, with swords, with packs, with beads, with baubles. But there is the one inn at the end for all, and a bed for each who comes.

Listlessly, his father's callous jest about poor little Lisette too trivial to rankle, France rode back. The Grand Seneschal had entered the courtyard and flung himself from the saddle; the black, glossy skin of his horse was flecked with foam. Diane on her white palfrey was with him. There were no stablemen in call, for their return was evidently unexpected. "Here, fellow, take my horse," cried De Brézé, and helped Diane to dismount, in a fashion so awkward and abrupt that France fancied he saw her lips tighten in distaste. Very likely it was only fancy. France did not know if he himself flushed; his cheeks were hot. What did it matter—now? He took the reins flung to him, but for a second his eyes and Diane's met. If his spoke at all, hers were still inscrutable—a mystery and an enigma, as they were always.

" Adieu, magnifiques festins!
Adieu, doux baisers! " DIANE OF POITIERS.

§ 1

IN the opening hours of 1515 the omens which had followed good Queen Anne's death proved too true. Among heavenly influences surely something simian must, mischievously, have its turn now and then with the affairs and destinies of men. King Louis, Father of his people, lay this time actually a-dying; had said so to Francis, his successor: " Francis, I am dying; I leave my good people to your care "; had said so to his new girl-Queen: " *Mignonne,* I am going to give you my New Year gift soon—*my death*." He was not really old. As men count years, he had reached only the prime of life, and many happy years should have been before him, now that his marriage had given peace to France and content and joy (if often weariness) to himself. It was near midnight, on January the first, that the King breathed his last, in the Hôtel des Tournelles in Paris. Of late sinister rumours had spread, and would not be suppressed. The Most Christian King was confined more and more often to his chamber; he was obliged to use the litter, though he hated it as effeminate, more and more often; gout made his limbs useless and often an intolerable agony; he could no longer dance; even in his old awkward fashion, to pleasure Queen Mary; his stomach began to refuse the rich and heavy foods, his head the heady wines, which had taken the place of simple fare and drink. For change of air he had moved from Palace to Palace without relief. " His young Queen," people said, who were sorry for him, " is taking him into Paradise, but she will get him there too soon for those who love our King." It is true that the Queen did not always have her own way. He trusted her, and she, loving another, and innocently coquettish towards most likeable men (not without significance, folk said, was the hat jauntily cocked over the eye so often) saw to it that he had no real cause for distrust. She liked him,

was grateful for his kindness, took all he could give with both hands, thanked heaven that the fulfilment of her bargain was no harder, as it might so easily have been, and reproached herself when her mind dwelt too long on probable and even speedy release. He was so very, very kind. When he denied her, firmness was tempered with humour; the twinkle was in his eye. An immense wealth of jewels had been ready for her wearing—fifty-six great pieces of diamonds and rubies, seven of the greatest and rarest jewels ever seen, a pearl the size of a pigeon's egg—ropes and strings of jewels worth hundreds and hundreds of thousands of ducats. But they were doled out. "No, no, *mignonne,* not all at once; you shall have them by degrees, and pay me at divers times by thanks and kisses." He was firm, too, even though he trusted her, in seeing that she was not left alone when he was absent; which was rarely. Madame Claude must ride or drive with her day by day; at night the Baronne d'Aumont shared her bed-chamber. That Jennifer Ennis and one or other of the few English who had remained still tended her was not sufficient; the girls were furious about that, and the girl who was Queen of France not less than they. Jennifer Ennis, meeting Alec Maclean one day, said it was hard for an English Princess, and sister of England's King, to stomach an old French woman always in her chamber, prying into all she did. But Madame d'Aumont was really quite inoffensive; and Alec said curtly that it always took a man and at least ten women to manage one wife's affairs. "So much the more shame for the man, then, who cannot guard even one wife," snapped Jennifer; the two always sparred. Alec retorted with some doggerel of the day.

" Femme est l'ennemy de l'amy,
Femme est péché inevitable,
Femme est familier ennemy,
Femme deçoit plus que le diable. . . .
Femme est tempest de maison. . . .
Femme est le serpen des serpens."

" What a meinie of wives ! " cried Jennifer, her brown eyes sparkling, as she used her own reading for the

"*femme*." "Monsieur, you should go pray for your soul at St. Avertin's shrine, who I hear was a Scotsman, and lies buried in Touraine. 'Tis a dangerous world with so many wives in it."

"By St. John of Perth, I can protect myself," said Alec, his freckled face flushing. "And by St. Andrew, we have saints a-plenty in our own Scotland without finding even a Scottish saint abroad—and I could swear by plenty, were I a man for swearing."

"Scotland, monsieur, is a fair land as I know; but the Scots so rarely love to dwell in it."

"And that, Mademoiselle, is not truth," said Alec, now angry. "Are you not abroad yourself, for that matter?"

"And so, for that matter, are you—yet a Scot."

They always sparred, but Alec did not often have the last word.

§2

It was only three months since the young Tudor Princess became, not altogether willingly, yet not altogether unwillingly, Queen of France—and now with the year 1515 hardly four and twenty hours old, she was a widow. King Louis lay dead in his great, rambling, squalid, splendid Palace of the Tournelles in Paris a year after his good companion Anne of Brittany died at Blois—a year almost to the day. In the vast blue-tiled hall the silent wooden figures, painted gaudily, of old, half-forgotten Kings looked down with a grotesque solemnity on this monarch belonging to the past now as much as they, gone on his last Progress so recently. Years had fallen from him, the rugged, life-beaten face had lost its weariness at last. In Touraine where he was best loved, naked folks, during his last illness, had been weeping and praying at all the shrines—vainly. In the Tournelles, many-turreted, prayers had gone on unceasingly in one or other of the twenty chapels—vainly. He lay dead in the magnificence and squalor of a Palace where the stench of the open sewers of the Marais penetrated even to the chamber in which he died.

In Paris, throughout the country, the bell-men were clanking melancholy bells, and croaking dismally: "Our good King Loys, Father of his people, is dead;

our good King Loys is dead!" Everywhere were weeping men, weeping women; there had never been a King better loved. And he linked a happier present with a barbaric past; Louis XI and Margaret of Anjou, the unhappy English Queen, had held him at the font. He had been merciful, a friend to the poor man; it was told how once, indignant at oppression, he had exclaimed: "Mean folk are the prey of soldiers and gentlemen, who are themselves often the devil's prey."

So Queen Mary, grateful for his goodness, and grown to like if she had not loved the elderly, broken man who had loved homely things—plain fare, early hours, proverbs, simple fables—yet had played gallant for her sake, wept a little also. May had dragged mellow October at her heels, in what, for Louis, became a dance of death. The girl did not weep very long. For six dreary weeks she must lie within closed curtains, between tapers, until her heavy mourning was done. Vigorous and full of life, she relieved the unutterable boredom which royal etiquette demanded by dwelling on those brief months of excitement and glitter—by thinking of the pretty things now wasted—by looking forward. Useless now, the many relics of that spell of pomp and state. She must lie a-bed in darkness like someone sick; and there were jewels worn and unworn, French and English and Milanese and Spanish dresses and hats—oh, wardrobes and drawers packed with them; gold tissues, laces, web lawn, cloth of silver, cloth of gold, purples, reds, greens, soft furs. . . . To think of them all, so wasted, was a tantalizing relief even to the monotony of bed in a six-week night. Her legs wanted to dance, her hands to do something, her cheeks to feel the fresh, sharp air, of the outer world. And she remembered Brandon, her lover, bronzed and handsome, as she had seen him riding at the head of his twenty Englishmen at her state entry. . . . The dazzle and rush of those three months! She thought of the immense escort which had seen her to the English coast on her journey. Four of the greatest nobles in the Kingdom, four hundred barons, two thousand knights, gentlemen, guards, officials, a thousand palfreys, a hundred carriages and litters for women had escorted her—and all for *this*. And

then the terrible crossing; the reception in France; the state entry; the pageants, the banquets, the dances, the joustings. . . . All for—*this*. So, tossing, and turning in the darkened room, at one moment she would dwell on every familiar word and little kindly action of the old King who lay dead, and must lie now through the dusty centuries in St. Denis; and she was sad and sorry about him; and at another moment she would wish it all begun again, to last a little longer; and at still another, would look forward with eager impatience to freedom and the man she loved, in a free world.*

The " great boy who would spoil all " was King of France at last. Already, while Mary of England kept her weeks of mourning, the watch ended their cry with " France is at peace, Paris is secure, Francis I is King! " It sounded through the rain, the snow, the frost; was heard in the five islands, on the five bridges, by the six gates. In the great hôtels of the nobles, in hovels nodding together across squalid alleys and tied and tangled streets which a pike might span, men and women woke, and crossed themselves, and muttered a prayer for the good King who was dead, and whose name the watch would never cry again. And France was at peace; a young King, handsome, gallant, dazzlingly if superficially brilliant, was on the throne. He was not yet twenty-one. Some muttered a prayer also that the big boy might not spoil all, but follow the old King's pattern, and rule well and wisely the land God had given him to rule.

§3

For a time, with Queen Mary, Queen no longer, it was " *Adieu, Magnifiques festins!* " With France Caillette, buried in Dauphiny, the " *doux baisers* " of his dreams must henceforth be dream-kisses and love-in-a-dream only. He did his work mechanically, without spirit, without ambition or ultimate aim. His whole world, past and present, seemed gone to pieces now; a hundred every-day things reminded him of his loss; his triple

* Three months after the death of King Louis, Mary married Charles Brandon. Their elder daughter was the mother of Lady Jane Grey, the Nine-day Queen.

loss, of past, present and future. The tiny gilded chain which he had taken tenderly from little Lisette when he scooped a grave for her lay with her absurdly plumed bonnet and gilded bells of old years, to remind him of the boyhood and its few gladnesses and reliefs. For some time longer Diane stayed at St. Vallier; when she had gone every stone, every tiny path, every tapestry and fald-stool and tree and book kept her in mind. De Brézé's visit lasted only a few days. When, once, he gave France curtly a note to deliver to Diane, the lad was too broken and hopeless to flame into useless and impolitic wrath. He cared little now what came of him. He had documents about the coming marriage to prepare, and the Count, knowing more than he said, gave him this work with a new courtesy, abrupt perhaps, but sympathetic, and almost apologetic. Such things had to be in the world, and hearts are broken and tinkered and mended every day. But France knew there would be no one in the world for him—never anyone—but Diane, who was lost.

It was a black day, though bright in Paris, when De Brézé and Diane were married. France Caillette went with his master. The marriage was at the Petit Bourbon in the Rue Git-le-Cœur, opposite the Louvre. The Duke, who had lent his town house for the ceremony, was now Constable. King Francis came, a blaze of young magnificence, charming all by his easy and polished grace; very debonair, and much interested in the girl-bride of the Seneschal, his friend and comrade. Louise came, triumphant at finding her "Cæsar" safely in the saddle at last; he would, if woman's will and wile had any way, never be dislodged. Queen Claude came, in a splendid silvered litter from the fine tower of the Tournelles, which had lately been given her for her Court; fat, not unpleasing, amiable, watching her husband now and then with pale, blue, troubled eyes; he could resist no woman, and marriages always affected him; an old, ugly husband—a very lovely wife—what thoughts were behind that receding brow of a dazzling husband still in his twenties, who could fascinate—and be fascinated—so easily? He had so many amours. Many a good burgher of Paris with a young, pretty wife

could give reasons for warning people of the King. There was a notorious episode in which an advocate's wife figured; this, and many other gallantries, had come to Claude's ears.

Papa Caillette had made new sayings—but, indeed, they were very ancient ones—about disparities of age. It was proper and just, he said, that old men should marry young wives if they could—a generous man, even if he could not read very well, did no harm in keeping a book for his better-learned friends. But to young men old wives were no profit. If he had a wife of forty, he would certainly take two of twenty in exchange, any day of the week. Himself, he had no mind for matrimony again, and had forsworn it. After all, there were no marriages in heaven. . . . There were no priests to make them.

Papa had not been lucky with Madame Belatte of Montbazon. On his way back to Loches, he had called at the inn, proposed to her in his cups, essayed to kiss her, and been swept by her broom into the arms of one of her twenty children, who held him while he summoned several of the others to teach him manners. He was very sore when he crept back into Loches, and sorer still, a short time after, when death robbed him of so easy a master as King Louis, and he saw himself facing the uncertainties of a new reign. King Francis was less simple in his tastes than poor King Louis.

From the gallery of the Petit Bourbon, that splendid house, France Caillette watched the royalties, the nobility, the officials, met to celebrate the wedding; all aristocratic Paris seemed there. Madame La Grande was with her daughter Suzanne de Bourbon. There was the Constable, tall, thin, with his long, melancholy, distinguished face, pale as ivory against the closely cropped black beard; he was as magnificent a figure as the young King, and was chatting with Marguerite d'Angoulême; her mother, the Duchess Louise, came up and joined them. It was well-known that Bourbon and Marguerite were good friends, but soon after Louise had joined them Bourbon made a stiff, courteous bow, and joined a group of noblemen near the great fire-place. It was a cold but bright March day, at Easter-tide; France's un-

happy desperate thoughts went back across the miles to St. Vallier and its grey castle, the banks of the Galaure, the blue Vivarais, the heathy plateau high among the mountains where he and Diane had spent bright March hours once after their ride—where little Lisette slept in her tiny grave in loneliness more fortunate than his own. Oh Diane, Diane!

She was married. There had been a private Mass quite early. The Grand Seneschal braced himself, as King Louis had done when he met his fresh young bride from England; he could not altogether, try as he might, conceal his lameness, and not all the tailor's art had been able to disguise the very noticeable hump. How ugly he was, how harsh and strong his face—harsher, stronger, because contorted into smiling gaiety. Diane had elected to dress, as always, very simply. She looked as fresh as her flowers, as white and unsullied as winter snows; her beauty was that of perfect health which fresh air, cold water, hard and regular exercise, an occupied mind which loved pleasant and beautiful things, had added to her almost perfect face and figure. She was lithe and graceful as a panther, he thought. She made Queen Claude, and the other women of royal blood, plain and mean and insignificant; except, of course, Madame La Grande, who was older, and could not look anything but regal. France noticed how the King, courteous but indifferent towards Claude, could not keep his eyes from the young bride—and wife.

Diane, who could not touch a flower with her delicate finger-tips without thrilling at its beauty—whom he had often seen in an ecstasy of delight at some lovely landscape revealed suddenly on their lonely rides together—who shuddered and was repulsed at the slightest contact with the ugly, the unclean, the malformed or unwholesome—who must have everything about her dainty, perfect, fresh and well-fashioned as all in heaven and earth came from the hand of God when He fashioned all—was joined to this maimed ugliness till death parted them. A Prelate, and dignitaries had blessed the ring—had blessed the bride. And she had told France often that she loved him; had wanted his kisses; had promised him her kisses when he chose to ask and take them.

He spoke to her only for a moment or two, and did not ask or take kisses. She had just been speaking to her father, he very elated, slightly touched by wine, handsome in his soldierly way, with his bullet-head of black hair, fine eyes not unlike Diane's, short dark beard, good features, and a splendid dress setting off an excellent carriage. He looked years younger than his son-in-law. In the old days they had spent so many hours together, and now he was only spared a few seconds. She was very pale, but her eyes were bright, and her mouth was set firmly as if an irrevocable choice had now been made and a promise given to which, for her part, come what might, she must be true. There was a slight awkwardness, and silence. Neither knew what to say; what was there to say? He muttered out at last: "Diane, I hope you may be happy." "France," she said, "we have been good friends, haven't we? If—if——" She recovered herself, for her firm lips had trembled just a little, and there was a glistening in her half-closed eyes. "There is no reason not to be friends, France," she whispered. "I shall always remember, and be your friend. Be mine too, and remember. Childhood, I think, is a quiet, pretty garden where we may go however old we are—but I shall not be old, ever—and however weary and sad, to be refreshed. The flowers die but we remember, and there is always the garden. I shall go back there often, and so must you. Be my friend."

"Always, Diane—always that."

"And my Knight always."

"And your true Knight, Diane."

Her father called her away to speak to Chabannes, Seigneur de la Palisse; a crowd surrounded her, smiling congratulations; soon she and De Brézé were gone.

§4

After the celebrations France Caillette spent a few days longer in Paris; he met Alec Maclean, for the Scottish Guard carried the old King's coffin to St. Denis, and stayed to guard the new King. France reproached himself with having almost forgotten that he still had one good and loyal friend in the world. The King, he heard, was soon to make a progress through his Kingdom, in

great state—to Bourges, to Moulins, to Lyons, to innumerable other cities, accompanied by thousands of nobles and attendants. "Lyons——" said Alec. "'Tis perhaps the first step into Italy again. God send that I go. They say that the Queen is near her time; he will surely wait for that, and afterwards our new King does not mean to have 'France is at peace!' cried much longer from Paris walls. 'Tis the plague of women that they must needs have babies just when no one wants them. But good luck to their Majesties, since they had no choice but to marry, being royal; a boy would gladden our King's heart. He is much under his mother's thumb even now, though she has too many amours of her own to molest him about his. So your little friend Diane is married, eh, France? A good escape for you. I feared once you were getting in the toils; there is no being even with women. We soldiers get rated much about such matters, and loving too freely and too often; but then, how the women fling themselves at a pretty coat, and think no less of a scarred face. I hear the Grand Seneschal has a scar an ell long, but I warrant your Diane recks little of that. She has found more old scars by now."

France flashed out; it was not often he and Alec had words. Diane was his friend.

"And sold herself for a good price, I hear, or was sold; which is much the same matter. A woman may always say no if she wants, let all the world say yes. But dangle jewels on a string—a fine toy castle or two—coax 'em with pretty dresses—pah, they are all the same!" Seeing his friend hurt and serious, he clapped a great freckled hand on France's knee, laughed, and said: "Maybe, lad, all are not the same. I admit there are good women to be found in the world, if one spends a life in looking for them, but it takes many candles to find them; ay, man, and there are far more snakes than eels in the basket, be sure of it. Our young King, they say, who has had his mistresses since he was fifteen, did make love to a maid of his Queen's once, who took no heed of him, but would have her own man, come what might, against his will. They say King Francis had his face finely clawed by her. . . . Come, come, break your

heart over no woman in God's world; not even the best of them is worth it. When one is on the ladder, like you, they only pull one down."

He was pleased about one thing; with his eyes always on the Milanais and Italy, King Francis was taking great interest in his army; there was a new scheme on foot for *compagnies d'ordonnance,* finely manned and horsed and equipped.

Before he left Paris France went to pay respects to his friend, the Constable; he had had no opportunity of speaking to him at the wedding. Bourbon, as always, was gracious and kind. He had—he said—France's interests still in mind and at heart; was glad he had given the Count of St. Vallier, his old friend, so much satisfaction, and had improved himself in so many ways; and both Madame La Grande and Madame Suzanne had spoken very well of him. He must come again, some day, to Moulins. With the next regime there were prospects of advancement; new appointments were being made, old ones cancelled. The Duke had so easy and gracious a manner, making his inferiors (but never his equals and superiors, though he had only one or two of these) forget that he was a great noble and Prince; his voice was so musical and pleasant; and France came away heartened a little. Bourbon, not a dozen years older than France, spoke to him in a manner almost fatherly.

And then . . . the long journey back with his master, to Dauphiny, and St. Vallier, which was the old St. Vallier no longer.

He heard from time to time news of Diane, but only once, slipped in a letter to her father, came a few lines in her firm, bold hand to France; just a friendly greeting and good wishes. The Grand Seneschal and his wife had gone, it seemed, to Normandy; he had a house in Rouen, the Château de Bouvreuil, but it was used more now for official purposes than for long residence. The château, built by Philip Augustus, was not in very good repair. During the English occupation of Normandy the Dukes of Clarence, York and Somerset, and the great Lord Warwick, had dwelt in it, and in one of the towers Joan of Arc had been imprisoned and questioned. The Grand Seneschal and his wife had been

given a magnificent reception. But both liked better his ancient castle of Anet, where there were flower gardens, fine stables, hounds, falcons, even hunting leopards; and great plains near for the chase, and in the background the forest of Dreux, where there was much game of all kinds to be had. The castle itself was gloomy; a heavy, square mass of masonry, pierced with two rows of lancet windows deep in the stone, a tall, strong tower at each angle, a battlemented wall surrounding all. The castle was entered by a single gate; it was deeply moated, with drawbridge and portcullis always closely guarded. In the great hall were dark and gloomy portraits of old lords. At Anet or near it the tragedy had occurred which had almost cost the De Brézés their fortune and their rank. Pierre de Brézé and Charlotte of France had been accustomed to hunt near Rouvres-les-Dourdans, a mile or so from the castle, where Diane and her husband now often hunted, and during these expeditions Pierre's Master of Hounds, Louis de la Vergne, a gentleman of a good Poitevan family, and Charlotte fell violently but secretly in love. One night Pierre de Brézé was told by his steward that he had seen them enter his wife's bed-chamber together. De Brézé took his sword, went noiselessly to the room, and, coming suddenly upon La Vergne, in his doublet and shirt, killed him—and then made search for his wife, who had fled in terror to an adjoining cabinet, where he found her hiding under a bed in which their children lay asleep. He dragged her out, stabbed her between the shoulders, flung her on her knees, and stabbed the wretched woman again and again until she was dead. Charlotte he buried in Coulins Abbey, but her lover in the garden of his hunting-lodge at Rouvres.

Diane and her husband spent much time at Anet for the hunting. She was trying to make the ancient château more habitable and less grim. But during part of the year she must be at Court, in attendance on Queen Claude as one of her ladies, who liked and trusted her. Diane could make herself very agreeable. She had a mild liking for Claude, fat, amiable, often tearful; a mild liking, mingled with a tolerant contempt. The King came now and then. He was very affable and

charming, and could talk of anything under the sun—war, dress, music, verse, the chase, books, pictures and sculpture and goldsmiths' work; there seemed little he did not know, though his knowledge was not very profound. He was always magnificently dressed, and was very handsome—though his body and legs were disproportioned, and he had, men said, the longest nose in all France. Women were fascinated by him and half-afraid of him. Tales of his gallantries were on every tongue.

The young King had not much time to spare for Diane, but he could resist no pretty woman, and she was lovely, and young, and fresh. She bore herself very discreetly. There was to be no second tragedy like that at Rouvres-les-Dourdans in the house in which she took the place of the unhappy Charlotte of France.

And, before long, all France and all Europe were talking of new wars.

CHAPTER XX WAR-TIME

" I lov'd a lass, a fair one,
As fair as e'er was seen,
She was indeed a rare one,
Another Sheba Queen.
But fool as then I was
I thought she lov'd me too,
But now, alas! she's left me,
Falero, lero, loo." G. WITHER, 1588-1667.

§1

IN April, 1515, a little Princess was born to Francis and Claude at Amboise, but lived only a short time. The King was now free for his Progress, and every wise and foreseeing man knew where that Progress was likely to carry him, before many months were out. He was young, ambitious, spoilt by the adulation and example of a foolish mother; the boy who had known the dull misery of the tiny Court at Cognac and the licence of Amboise had a fair realm and all within it for playthings. It did not augur well for the land that Antoine Duprat was Chancellor, a man very different from the good Cardinal d'Amboise who had served King

Louis and his Queen as well, or that Louise of Savoy and the new Chancellor were hand and glove together.

There was a see-saw of offices; since the coronation at Rheims in January men who had been up were down, men who had been down were up. The wild companions of Francis in his boyhood and early youth were in fortune's way. Old and wise men who had served their country faithfully found themselves displaced by scatterbrains who had shared in the King's nocturnal adventures in Paris, and now were called upon to share an adventure more magnificent than the old rough-and-tumbles with the Watch, or the seduction or raping of plain citizens' wives and daughters. Decent folk had heard too much of their young King to trust their women-kind within his sight and reach. He was dangerous; if he cast his eyes on a girl she was lost. A great passion of the new reign was with a young wife, living innocently with her husband in the provinces, who was lured to Paris by a trick. "A Court without ladies is a year without spring, and a spring without roses," was a saying often on his lips, and always borne in mind. There had been lovely girls in plenty at his mother's mimic Court at Amboise, with whom he might amuse himself while she amused herself with her handsome officers.

He had charm, physical beauty, a liking for the arts; a wide knowledge of innumerable subjects on which he could talk with ease without being unwise enough to venture far beyond his depth, he dressed magnificently, wrote passable verses, read romances, was brave, was generous with gifts.

He was superficial, weak, vain, treacherous, shameless, fickle, disloyal.

"'*Souvent femme varie,*
Bien fol est qui s'y fie,'
Une femme souvent
N'est q'une plume du vent."

he wrote once himself of women. But he himself was but a feather—a gilded, coloured feather—in the wind, changing with every turn and puff of it.

This was the King who ruled France in place of the

honest, kindly, homely, simple-minded, loyal old King who preceded him.

The great adventure for which the smaller adventures of his youth were to be exchanged was the recovery of the Milanais. His new companies of ordnance, the newly levied troops and new appointments, were all devised to that end; the royal Progress was wending towards Lyons and the road to the Alps. He travelled by easy stages, with a vast escort of nobles and gentlemen, guards and men-at-arms, officials, and servants; women. In May he was at Amboise for the wedding of the Constable's sister, Mademoiselle de Bourbon, with the Duke of Lorraine. Mourning for King Louis was not altogether ended; there were no balls in Paris or the provinces. (In Paris, the great arsenal close to the Bastille St. Antoine was secretly busy, though few spoke openly of war.) It was during this visit to Amboise, where fat little gentle Claude shed more of her many tears because her baby was dead, that the sport was devised of turning a young boar trapped in the forest loose in the great courtyard, while the King and Court flung darts at it from galleries and windows. In its agony and fury the boar charged up the staircase and through several ante-rooms, scattering its panic-stricken tormentors, and finally thrust its way through velvet curtains into the room where the King was with the Queen and her ladies. Francis placed himself in the way of the animal, evaded it, and stabbed it to the heart before it could turn. . . . A King certainly physically brave.

And it was at Amboise during this visit that the King's mother, free at last to give rein, unchecked by any greater than herself, to her ungovernable passions, made violent and almost open love to Bourbon, pressed gifts on him, a ring among them—and was coldly repulsed. Better than any woman in the world, he loved his little, pale Suzanne, though she was not beautiful, but only slightly pretty—his Suzanne, who loved him and knew he was loyal to her even if she could not breathe through her nose, and was lame, and fragile. She was gentle and sweet, and modest.

Louise of Savoy, rich and powerful at last after her long insignificance, her many humiliations and rebuffs

and corrections, found in Bourbon the one passion of her life, the one man above all others whom she wanted and could not do without—and he would have none of her, but rejected her advances with at first a cold indifferent courtesy, and then with impatient scorn. She was furious, but her passion grew with his refusal to gratify it. Louise had been created Duchess of Angoulême by her son; every whim she had was gratified; she was rich at last, and loved money, to spend but even more to hoard; she was powerful, and Cardinal Duprat was in her confidence and interest; her laxity since her husband's death was so notorious that public opinion never troubled her—she wanted, she took, and here was something she wanted as she had never wanted before in her chequered, thwarted, embittered life; but she might not have it.

In those few days at Amboise this great Prince on whom her heart was set drew eyes even from the young, gallant, and brilliant King; he was more than ever desirable; at night she lay thinking of him, wanting him, scheming for him, weeping hot tears of rage and baffled longing. Few monarchs were as rich, kept so magnificent a state, none were more noble, more accomplished, haughtier, more brave. His very coming into Amboise had been spectacular; late by intention, so that when the excitement of the King's arrival had passed an arrival so dramatic might set him and the King in rivalry to the latter's disadvantage. Bourbon, with the most splendid retinue, had dashed up at almost the last moment, on a perfect horse perfectly trained, which curvetted, leapt, vaulted an obstacle, at a light touch and a soft word, showing its own beauty and its master's grace and command. Glittering mail in sunshine—a sash of silver cloth, fringed—the sword-scabbard of gold—the poniard blazing with diamonds—plumes white and crimson—jewelled housings. And later, in his Constable's garb, his long robe of cloth of gold and the costliest and rarest sables, the sword of office flashing with precious metal and gems, how glorious he looked—the luminous dark eyes, the strongly aquiline nose, the jetty hair and crisp, short beard, the air of pride, sombre melancholy, reserve and self-control. . . . In every thought, of day and night alike, she saw him even when

he was not present, and her heart ached with hopeless longing. A little, fragile, deformed girl came between them.

But if Suzanne died . . . then. . . .

The King and Bourbon had been lads together, though the latter was the elder; with the beginning of the new reign there had been friction frequently, and the passion of the King's mother, which she was at no pains to conceal, did not make the amity between her son and the man she loved any closer. With an easy grace, but sometimes with light banter to which the Constable gave sharp, stinging retorts (he took umbrage easily) Francis tried at first to make friends. During the Progress there was friction. Bourbon was acutely conscious that the old, easy days of King Louis and Queen Anne had gone; that Madame, ever his friend from childhood, was no longer in the position she had held in the former reign, when Louise stayed as almost a nobody at the Moulins Court. A great lady still, Madame La Grande had lived on too long, into an age of adventurers, ambitious schemers, mistresses, a Queen friendly to her but powerless, a young King spoilt in his minority, selfish, restlessly ambitious—and the greatest woman in all France a needy girl she had once befriended, once checked, once admonished.

The Constable did not take the new turn of affairs easily, though to Francis he owed the Constable's sword. He suspected slights everywhere, and used his vast wealth and immense prestige to assert his position. A splendid state barge must be built for his use on the Saone, rivalling the royal barges; it was in form of a swan, covered with cloth of silver, manned by oarsmen, in his livery, and distinguished by his arms and badges. He attempted at the entry into one city to induce the Mayor and Burgesses to provide a canopy indicating equal state with that of the King; this was refused, with profuse apologies that did not succeed in mollifying his resentment. These were trifling matters, but rankled; in early autumn war came, to distract his thought and fill his mind with new ambitions. His younger brother François went with him.

Francis, moving steadily southwards, had included Moulins in his journey. The King and his greatest

subject were still on terms of apparent friendship, though the former broke through his ease and charm of manner now and then to say veiled, pointed things, and Bourbon's taciturnity broke now and then into haughty, irritated retorts. At feats of arms the Constable had more than once shown himself the superior of Francis, even when they were lads together. Bourbon was irritated over some of the new appointments; this man, he said, was descended from ancestors who were glad to hold the stirrups of his own, yet must be given rank altogether beyond deserts. They differed over the conduct of the coming war. Already, in the Alps, Swiss mountain-folk had been bribed to discover or reveal a new route for the French forces; it had been decided to essay one hitherto unknown pass, while feinting to advance by one already known and traversed. Over this, a secret to the world, the King and Duke had hot words; Bourbon did not improve matters by quoting bitterly a saying then current of a new Fool at the Court, one Hippolyte who had been dubbed "Polite": "Why worry about getting into Italy? 'Tis easy enough; the difficulty is to get out."

§2

France Caillette went as Secretary to his master to the meeting of generals at Lyons, the jumping-off place for the expedition. Bourbon was there, and France was in a mind to ask if he might not go, but he had no opportunity of speaking to the Constable except for a brief minute, with others round. Bourbon found time to say a few friendly words; when this business was over he would bear Monseigneur de St. Vallier's Secretary, and his own very good friend, in mind; once the Italian matters were settled, there would be swift advancement, no doubt, for civilians of marked ability; perhaps in Italy his services might be needed later, when the rough fighting was done. De Brézé was of the company. Diane had come to see her husband off, but she was a very great lady now, high above him, and always with a crowd of glittering folk round her; the King seemed to pay her considerable attention. She bore herself well, with a pleasing grace and

modesty, and was very attentive to her hunchback husband, who appeared devoted to her, but inclined to jealousy and brusque in his manner and speech; his starting, bloodshot eyes followed her everywhere, possessively, suspiciously almost; but if she noticed this she showed it only in the faintest heightened colour and a discretion bordering on stiffness. For all her new greatness she seemed to France less proud. They, too, met only for a minute in company, and but for half a dozen words only their eyes spoke. And his could speak only with a kind of nearly-dumb anxiety and nearly-mute inquiry; and hers—— Well, he never knew quite what they said, or wanted to say.

So again they touched and passed, and went away, she to Queen Claude, he to St. Vallier where he was to guard his master's interests. Lyons was full of troops. Some said forty thousand men were to cross the Alps, some said fewer, some many more. Every inn, every stable, every house, every street and alley, was packed with soldiers; cavalry, infantry, artillery. Nobles had brought their followers from almost every corner of the Kingdom; the tongues of Babel mingled. There were frequent quarrels between the men-at-arms; Bourbon's men and Bonnivet's came to blows, and some blood was shed. The new Companies of Ordinance had assembled. "Adventurers" mingled with lansquenets in their tattered finery. Trumpet calls, from morning to night, rent the air.

During the King's absence, the Duchess of Angoulême was to rule the Kingdom. But Francis found the ladies of Lyons very attractive; he loitered for days after most of his troops had gone.

One day, just before he left for Dauphiny, France encountered Alec in a narrow street near the river; his friend was drinking wine with some other Scottish Guardsmen in the estaminet of a small inn. Yes, Maclean was to go, when the King finally decided to start; he was all impatience; here was his chance, but this "big boy who would spoil all" as good old King Louis had called him was beginning to spoil all already. Why was he on ill terms with the Constable? Everyone knew it, though a veneer of courtesy and friendli-

ness was kept up in public; the Guards, being in close contact with his Christian Majesty, heard more than the outer world. The Scottish Guard had been given fine new uniforms—white and gold, with the Salamander on back and front where the porcupine of King Louis had been. But wars are not won by parade fineries. Of course King and Constable had too much sense to ruin their country by their squabbles, but that tiger-cat the King's mother (this was whispered) had her ten fingers and thumbs in the pie, and might work mischief. Why was the most Christian King loitering after petticoats in Lyons? Never a great King came to ruin but through women. David did; Solomon did; Herod did; James of Scotland—oh, there were a hundred examples. Few monarchs were as wise as the English King, Henry VIII, who was content with his own good wife; though even he might perhaps be better without one.

France asked after old friends, when Alec became too sympathetic with him because he bore pen instead of arms, and must stay at home with women and children. Charles Caillette and Triboulet were to be kept in the new King's service; there was not much use for them now, as Triboulet had said, because all the Fools must soon be abroad fighting other Fools, but he meant to stay at home and do his own fighting. Papa and Triboulet were still at daggers drawn, and there were venomous words, contemptuous and gross gestures, sometimes bloodshed, when they met. Both were in high hopes that, after the war, if it ever ended, there would be a *Fou-en-titre* more lavishly rewarded than any in the old days, and each was expectant that the honour would fall to him. At present the King preferred female fools. He had odd tastes in humour; but then he was young, and when more seasoned might appreciate better the old, time-honoured, proven jests and songs that had pleased King Louis; he had shown a regrettable liking for slender and veiled indelicacies, for fantastic verses in which neither Papa nor Triboulet could see much cleverness or merriment, and for acrostics and crude games of rhymes. But he would doubtless grow wise in time, and Fools of the old fashion would come into their own again.

And then, thought Caillette, it would be Caillette's turn to be King of Fools in France.

So much France Caillette gathered; but he cared little now about these petty rivalries and squabbles of the *Salle des Fous* and the Royal Kitchens. He mentioned a few names, listlessly; Glareanus had become out-of-date and was to be superseded, but it was all martial music and love songs now; the old pious days had gone. Nobody spoke now of the old Queen's Confessor, Maheuc; and he wandered quietly in Loches like a grey-brown ghost, not resentful, happy over simple things; a good man. Antoine Duprat, that schemer and string-puller, ruled the Church, and all but ruled the State. Listlessly, France asked of his friend's own friends. Alec had been saying that he was glad to be away to the wars; there had been already enough springs in the King's year—too many roses in the springs. He did not say so in as many words, but gruffly and bluntly; oh, he could not abide women. Yet something troubled him as he spoke; his eyes looked wistfully into blankness. A soldier and a lass were going down the alley arm in arm towards the river; they were very close together; a few whispered words were caught, as they passed.

France asked after some of the Scottish Guard who were Alec's friends, and whom he himself knew slightly; still listless, and not greatly interested—what did life matter now?—he mentioned casually Jennifer Ennis. For a minute Alec did not answer. Suddenly he turned troubled eyes on the Secretary. "Eh? Oh, well enough, lad; no doubt she is, and merry; I do not fash myself about women's health, 'tis their own business. . . . Not that there is not a woman or so left that's almost as good as a man." He glanced at France suspiciously, fearing too much had been said. "My old mother," he went on hastily, "has sent me through the priest a box of stavesacre ointment to mend any wounds I have; in Scotland 'tis a great remedy." He went on abruptly to speak of other things, giving France much sound counsel, but no more just then of women.

When they said farewell he held France's hand in his own great freckled hand, and said: "Well, lad, the

good God that is Scotland's God and France's God be with you, and Our Lady, and the Saints." And then, huskily, he added in a voice no one else could hear: "'Twill be no such light matter as they think to get the Milanais back, but we shall do it. I'm thinking, though, France, that many who march bravely enough away will not come bravely back. If I fall 'tis no matter; but keep an eye if it can see so far on my old mother; and 'twill be no harm in it if you do a good turn to that same Jennifer Ennis if she needs it. All women are feckless and silly, but I wish her no harm if I die." And he went quickly away, without turning for any last salute. It was no light matter, as Alec had predicted, to get back the Milanais; but the Italian campaign, once they had reached the Lombard Plains, went more famously than any had dared to hope; Marignano gave them Sforza's rich Duchy. Great tales were told of the King's valour; how he had led the gendarmerie in thirty furious charges, most gallantly; how, all one night, he had stayed with his artillery, sleeping on a gun-carriage; how Bayard had knighted him on the field, leaping three times with joy because the honour had fallen to his lot. Endless rumours came, to be denied, and confirmed, and denied again, and confirmed. There had been a wonderful reception in Rome, the Pope and thirty Cardinals being present. . . . At Marignano the too confident Swiss had been slaughtered as easily as sheep packed in a fold. . . . Thousands of livres were to be given Monseigneur de St. Vallier for quelling the mutiny at Grenoble when the troops passed through. . . . The Seneschal of Normandy had shown himself as fine a soldier as in the old wars. (But what of Madame La Grant' Sénéchalle? She was circumspect enough; but was it natural for a girl so beautiful and fresh to love a hunchback thrice her years? Oh, she was above suspicion; good, and beautiful, and loyal; miraculous as it seemed, she loved her ogre of a husband. . . . The King had liked her? Silly scandal; besides, was ever a pretty woman his eyes missed?)

François de Bourbon, fighting at his brother's side, had been killed; the Duke was sorely stricken by it, but

too proud to make any sign. . . . Now that Maximilian Sforza had been beaten the Constable was to rule the Milanais as the King's Viceroy. . . . The entry had been magnificent beyond conception. But the Viceroy's face was like a mask. . . .

So the talk went, in ale-stakes, market-places, hovels, palaces, where grown and hale men were scarce. To St. Vallier itself came rumours; it was on the high road to Italy, and again couriers hastened to and fro.

And France, too young and full of life always to brood listlessly over his loss, found much work to do, and did it as well as he could. In spare time he kept away melancholy thoughts with study. He loved knowledge and loved work; ambition began to reassert itself; there were still ladders to climb. Not the sword only was powerful in the world; and, fighting being for the time ended and surely for ever ended, if that holocaust of gallant dead had any lessons for mankind—pen and parchment had their day. The Swiss had signed the Peace of Fribourg. Pope Leo had given up Parma and other rich dominions, and had signed the Peace of Viterbo. There was a treaty signed with Spain at Noyon.

Pens were mightier in the end than swords—though swords, perhaps, had first to make sharp the pen-points. Parchment had other uses than drumming defiances and charges. And Love? A light, passing thing in a man's life, forgotten when weightier matters were on hand. Wars and Treaties were, after all, men's matters, which women meddled in to the hurt of things, and their own detriment. Diane had not wanted him well enough to fight for him, and be patient, and wait; as he, a man now, would have fought, and been patient, and waited:

"Varium et mutabile semper femina" . . .

He wrote a letter to Alec's old mother, sending it to her priest, by the hands of a Scot going back from the little Scottish colony near Bourges; he asked once of Jennifer Ennis, now at the new Queen's Court where Diane was; the friend at Amboise to whom he wrote told him that the girl was well, but not very happy or contented.

Of Diane he heard little, and no letters passed.

His old lightness of heart—but it had always been tinged with melancholy—came back gradually as the months passed; he worked hard, was early and late at his books, and made now and then a friend who might some day be useful. Deep in his heart, not revealed and not even acknowledged to himself, was somewhere this thought: "I was not good enough; she did not trust me, and would not wait, though she loved me a little. But Diane loved Diane better than all else. . . . By and by she shall see that, if my father was in reality the King's Fool, I who loved her once and wanted her once am no fool. I do not want her now—that is ended."

Yet at night, alone in the little room in the little tower, where he still slept, loving it, and its simplicity, he would lie sometimes listening to the soft cooing of the doves in the cote, and the swaying of the trees in the pleasure garden, and the plash of the fountain, silvered, perhaps, by the moon which showed on moonlit nights in the oval window. The crucifix still hung above his bed, but in privacy he troubled the suffering Christ little now; God, he thought, had not been very kind.

And in his heart there were always loneliness and aching; in his dreams was Diane.

She did not need him. Her choice was made, and they said she was happy, and fond of her husband, and glad to be Sénéchalle of Normandy—so great a lady now, almost the greatest to whom folk paid homage. And rumour ran that before very long now another little child was coming to prove to the world the love which Louis de Brézé and his wife had for one another.

§3

She had said once, in the hurried moment when she was just wed: "I shall always remember and be your friend, France; be mine too, and remember. . . . There is always the garden. I shall go back often, and so must you. . . . Be my friend, France, and my Knight always."

And he had answered: "Always, your true Knight, Diane!"

He would rise sometimes, being sleepless, and look out into the garden of their childhood.

If she wanted him (but now how could she ever want him?) he knew in his heart that he would come, even from the world's end.

CHAPTER XXI THE CHRISTENING AT MOULINS

"Is she wronged?
To the rescue . . . my Heart."

PIPPA PASSES.

§1

THE Constable de Bourbon's magnificent reign in Italy came to an abrupt end in the May after Marignano. Odet de Foix, now Marshal de Lautrec, took his place, and Bourbon returned in high dudgeon to France. The King's new favourite, Madame de Châteaubriant, who was Lautrec's sister, was said to have contrived this, but it was whispered also that the Duchess of Angoulême had a mind to humble his pride, and had at least moved no finger to help the man she had passionately loved, and now as passionately hated. He was too proud to show open resentment, except, perhaps, in a display of even greater magnificence than before on his own estates and at his fine hôtel in Paris.

After his arrival from Italy, in a semi-disgrace the humiliation of which he was too haughty to admit by any open sign, the Duke met Francis, Queen Claude and the Duchess of Angoulême at Vienne in Dauphiny, and they travelled in company to his Palace of Moulins, where Suzanne and Anne of France were waiting to welcome them. No King could have entertained more sumptuously a fellow sovereign than the great noble his guests, two of whom at least had treated him so scurvily. The days passed in a round of pageants, joustings, huntings, banquets, dances, masques. Outwardly all was gay, happy, veneered with punctilious courtesy; but under the smiling and sunny surface were hidden dangerous eddies; whirlpools of contended turbulence and unrest beneath calmly flowing time. Louise bit her

lips in secret at the unfailing and perfect politeness which, she knew, concealed the Duke's contempt and dislike. He knew that she and Duprat, her creature, had helped at least by silence to secure his dismissal from the vice-royalty; he knew that her gracious and affable bearing towards Suzanne was but the putting on of a domino to conceal the chagrin of burning lust, spleen, jealousy, wounded pride. Her eyes could not always help telling part of the tale. Very fragile, snow-drop pale, Suzanne, deformed and almost plain as she was, held tightly in her frail hands the heart of her husband—and lover. Louise stole glances at her; how long could this rival live to stand between herself and the man she, while ready and even anxious to hurt, still loved passionately? Since his brother's death the Duke's melancholy had deepened; as yet, when the King and his consort and mother were at Moulins, there was no hint that any heir might be born. So the glittering days passed; externally all happy, merry, amicable; and yet the chief actors masked; the King and Bourbon on edge and skirting the brink of open strife; the Duchess of Angoulême at once loving and hating the Duke, despising and envying Suzanne, and finding it hard to keep venom out of her conversations with Madame La Grande, who in her turn had no liking for an upstart she had once befriended, and whom the throw of fortune's dice had made more important than she herself.

The Duke was glad to be done with this visit, and free to live quietly and simply at Chantelle, with his vassals, his pictures and tapestries and books and music, his little, loving wife. Occasionally he visited old friends, near and far. He went into Normandy; came once or twice to see the Count of St. Vallier at St. Vallier. France found him more than ever gracious. The Duke spoke with feeling of his brother's death by his side at Marignano; it amazed France to find so great a Prince take him so much into confidence. Did he, then, believe or more than half believe the old story of France Caillette's birth? If so the explanation was simple; and indeed there seemed underlying his talk at least some acknowledgment that the two were really of the same blood, or that Bourbon was more ready to

have it so; now that his brothers were all gone, and he lonely. He made half-promises; France was excited, even thrilled; but why had not hopes of promotion and sometimes what seemed hints of position beyond his wildest dreams, been held out when they were of value? They came too late; Diane, whom once they might have gained for him, was lost. . . . And yet the Count's young Secretary was less weary of the world and its successes than he liked to persuade himself. He would love Diane always, even hopelessly, and be her good Knight ready to answer the faintest appeal for aid. Yet he was young; the world full of prizes; and he had no distaste for the thought that Bourbon seemed ready to credit the old story that France was his brother's son born out of wedlock. The thought would creep in that Diane might hear some day of his prosperity and importance, and be a little sorry she had not been loyal enough or had faith enough to wait. But her second little daughter had now been born to her; perhaps in the thronged interests of her busy life, the past was all forgotten.

The Duke went back to Chantelle without anything definite having been said. He was very friendly, very encouraging, even almost paternal—but very vague. So France went on with his work. There was much to be done, and he did not spare himself, finding relief in constant occupation. His master was raising money to loan it to the King for the pay of his troops in Italy; the estates wanted constant supervision; he had little time left for concern about matters passing in the outside world. He knew that Queen Claude had at last been crowned with much ceremony—blue and white canopy with the French and Breton arms, festivities, dances and processions in national costumes—all that—Diane and her husband were there. She went later to De Brézé to join the King on one of his little, lightning progresses—a bevy of lovely girls accompanied his Christian Majesty, and report ran that the Seneschal of Normandy showed no reluctance to be in their company, old as he was and married. Rouen, and great cheer there; Mauny for the hunting; the King had killed a great stag in the forest; then they went to

Havre-de-Grâce, for the launching of a ship, afterwards into Brittany, and later still Diane had had another child, again a daughter—whom they named Françoise. She was by and by to have her portrait painted by an Italian artist, an old man and famous, whom the King had drawn to France; he superintended the pageants which Francis loved so much. Leonardo da Vinci was this artist's name. Queen Claude, too, had had a baby, a boy, who was called Henri.*

Another Henry, Henry of England, came by and by to France, and tongues wagged endlessly about the splendours of the Cloth of Gold. The Kings were like brothers; King Henry had even dyed his reddish beard golden yellow out of compliment to his host's; Bourbon, of whose magnificence and lavishness all spoke with hushed admiration, had given the English monarch a courser which could leap its own height, with trappings and housings for it worth a Count's ransom. But King Henry had made a somewhat sinister comment. "Brother," he had said to King Francis, "were any subject of mine so splendid as he, I could not afford to leave his head long on his shoulders." Not that the Constable cared much, in that dark, superb pride of his that was more than regal, what even Kings said of him between themselves.

He cared less than ever when his little, fragile wife whispered a secret at Chantelle which meant almost unbelievable joy to them both; they had been married so long without issue of their great love for one another. At Notre Dame de Puys and other shrines they knelt together, giving thanks, and praying that if God and Our Lady and the Saints could be so kind it might be a little son.

A boy was born—the first that had been given to any Bourbon Duke and Duchess for eighty years.

§2

King Francis, easy and ready to please when it cost him little, sent a most amiable message. (But privately

* Afterwards Henri II, Diane's lover. He was born in 1518, the year in which Diane's second child was born. Diane was then eighteen and three months old.

to his friends he quoted old King Louis on Bourbon and the danger of still waters; by a Gentleman's Faith, the Constable had taken his time, and been very secretive about this! For more reasons than one, it was not news likely to please very greatly the King's mother.)

Openly he said that the news delighted him; he would himself come to Moulins and hold the infant at the font, and make him a Christian. Indeed, the King was graciously anxious for the child to bear his name.

So, in October, 1521, the little three-months-old child of Charles de Bourbon and Suzanne—a baby puny and weak and waxen, always crying and ailing, but very wonderful and precious for all that to his parents—had his fine christening at Moulins, half the great folk of the realm being there to help the "Most Christian King" make him a proper Christian, according to his promise. Francis, after the sovereign whose own christening had been so much less magnificent, was to be henceforth the child's first name; he was made Count of Clermont also. Anne of France—"Madame La Grande"—was god-mother; the Bishop of Lisieux officiated in the chapel at Moulins, which had been richly adorned and decorated for the occasion with the choicest treasures of Moulins, Chantelle, and Châtelherault. All the bishops and nobility of the countryside were there, and many from far afield. The famous Bayard had come, model of chivalry, envied of men, hopelessly loved by many women, to knight the infant with the sword which had won glory on so many fields. Very gallantly and joyously he dubbed the tiny combatant just entering life's lists.

And then, for a fortnight, Moulins and the countryside which flocked into it were given up to gaiety and revelry. Lords in richest velvet and gayest plumes, and with massive chains of gold so long that they passed three times around the neck, waited on the great noble whose bread they ate. The red skirted or blue skirted guards of Bourbon, with feathered morions, with the crest of the Running Stag and the motto "*Penetrabit*" on back and breast, were everywhere, controlling crowds of gaping country-folk from the Allier watershed, escorting their Prince, holding aloft on staircases and

in the hall flaming torches to light banquet and masque and dance. Open spaces and streets were packed with tents to house visitors. There were hunting in the great Park every day, when much game was slain; and sports and games indoors and out-baitings, sieges of mimic forts, tennis and *l'escaigne*, feats of horsemanship, archery, cards and chess, joustings, rough frolicings.

The Seneschal of Normandy and his beautiful young wife were there. Her babies were with nun nurses on the Norman coast. The Count of St. Vallier and his newly-wedded wife, Françoise de Chabannes, came to Moulins. And, with his master, was the young Secretary, France Caillette. He had become almost indispensable now to St. Vallier, and, having faced his loss, and diverted his energies as far as possible to the making of a career, he had equipped himself with knowledge and accomplishments qualifying him for any further opportunities that might come; here, at Moulins, were certainly chances. The Constable was in high elation over the birth and christening of his heir, and well-disposed towards him and the world; the King, fount of honours and offices and promotions, was at Moulins. In the glittering company the Secretary, quietly but well dressed, in the latest fashion and knowing how to wear his clothes both by instinct and through close observation of examples and warnings—his "pence of observation" having been put to so good use—had no reason to blush; he was the inferior of none in manly and knightly accomplishments, or courtly graces.

He saw Diane—many times, but again generally at a distance. Now and then at banquets he noticed her near the King, who paid her a kind of playful court; twice or thrice Diane's eyes and France's met. Her look, as always, was enigmatical, mysterious, saying little but doubtless hiding much; he thought he saw a certain wistfulness in it, and soft remembrance of old days. He steeled himself. He was her Knight always, to come at need; he loved her, and must always love; but——

Well, if he had lost her, she also had lost him. De Brézé's gruff endearments must satisfy her now; he who danced awkwardly in a lame shuffle with her as

partner; told risky stories at which the King laughed and Bourbon kept an imperturbable, proud, but now less melancholy face (so great his joy at the little son's coming) he who hunted beside her, and, when the long night's merriment was done and the candles and torches flickered and paled with approaching dawn, shared her bed. Once or twice France went alone, away from the glare and noise, to the quiet walks on the bank of Allier. In the arbour where Diane and he had once talked, kissed, made love in their own odd fashion, a peasant lad and a girl, both flushed and merry from the fountains which spurted wine for all who chose to drink, were making their rude and boisterous love. . . . France the boy, Diane the girl, who had met there once and whispered there once were ghosts now of a dead and long-ago past, though so short a time had really sped.

He saw Madame La Grande, very gracious and kindly, who remembered his songs; he must sing one evening to the great guests after a banquet—she would speak about it to Monseigneur de Bourbon. The King loved a good song, and had written some fair ones himself. Madame's dear son and daughter, the Constable and Madame Suzanne, both had France's interests at heart, she knew; they were always favourably inclined to him. . . . *Besides*. . . . It seemed that something else she thought better of was at her tongue-tip; her gaze became very penetrating, and rested in a sort of wondering and puzzlement on the lad's handsome face before she dismissed him in her kindly, slightly austere, majestic way.

And he saw Bourbon, but here he met with some disappointment. The Duke was full of affairs, busy with arrangements for the entertaining of his guests, and excited as France had never before seen him because of his little son, the Count of Clermont. He talked to France about the child with a pride totally different from the old pride which had never been far beneath the affability and perfect courtesy of his manner. The boy was growing apace, he said; a fine lad; God and Our Lady and the Saints had been very, very gracious. It was evident that his whole mind was centred on this tiny heir born to his vast estates and many titles; that

dreams of future delights glowed within and warmed him; here were so many new interests to come, the keen satisfactions to Suzanne and himself of watching the baby grow into childhood, walk, talk, show character and intelligence, of having him educated in all manliness and chivalry—this tiny princeling whom Bayard himself had dubbed Knight—the coming comradeship and innumerable sympathies and linked interests. Looking forward along life's pathway Bourbon saw it a path of roses, lit to the very end with sunshine. His race would not die out; if he went first, if Suzanne went first, the one left would not now be utterly desolate and alone.

In the few minutes of their talk, though his patron and friend was no less kind—indeed, was even more kind, and so ready to ignore the differences of rank that he spoke as if they were on an equality—France noticed that the note of almost paternal interest in him was somehow lacking. It had been very marked at their last meeting when Bourbon still mourned his dead brother, and stood alone and without successor. The baby had altered all that.

He spoke, indeed, about the mystery of France's birth. It seemed an insoluble mystery (he said) and must remain so. Without any evidence than the ouche with the Bourbon crest which had certainly belonged once to Louis de Montpensier, the Constable's elder and long-dead brother (the lad had been wild—a natural son was quite possible) and that stranger evidence of likeness, France Caillette must be content to stay France Caillette, and must build no hopes on problematic kinship. For all that the Constable had been and would always be his good friend. There was a Spanish tale (he told France) of some magic cloth out of which garments were made, and it had this property; those who wore the garments had the secrets of their birth betrayed by them; if they were bastards, the cloth became transparent, their nakedness was not hidden, and all men knew it save themselves. A great King not (as he supposed) of royal birth, was revealed thus to his subjects, though they dare say nothing when he passed nude through his capital. . . . But such cloth was not woven nowadays. France could not put on such a

garment to prove to his patron and the world whether he was of Princely though illegitimate birth, or the son of the Kitchen-Fool at Loches. He had done well with the advantages that had been given him—very well. By and by the little Count would need tutors; and when that came France Caillette would be remembered. In the meantime, was he satisfied to be with the Count de St. Vallier at St. Vallier?

France said that he had a good master, but often he longed for greater opportunities than the little hamlet on the Galaure gave him.

Bourbon's slender, jewelled fingers drummed on the table. "True," he said, "there is no great opportunity at St. Vallier for a lad so likely; 'twas but as a stop-gap you went there; I had dreams. . . . But my little heir changes many things. . . . I think already the little, funny sounds he makes mean baby-words, though his mother laughs and says 'No.'" He smiled, a smile very pleasing. "There is nothing much I can do for you yet, France; a baby is women's business at the first. If I have an opportunity—though I do not like begging favours for myself from any man—I will speak for you to the King, or, failing him, to certain of my friends, high in the State. And always Madame and I wish you well, and are your very good friends ourselves."

He was smilingly dismissed, Bourbon turning at once to examine a lovely little rattle of gold and gems which lay on the table near his hand; it was the work of a famous artist, and had just come from Italy.

So the half-promises, the half-hopes, had not come to a great deal. Some day he might be the child's tutor. The King might some day interest himself in his career. Well, there was another half-hope, another half-promise, in that.

§3

France had a room, not very large, but furnished luxuriously and in perfect taste, near his master's, and not far from the splendid apartments allotted to Diane and the Grand Seneschal. Late one afternoon he happened to pass the door of the room in which she and

her husband slept. It had seemed to him at first a fresh instance of fate's malignity that brought them so very near and yet so very, very far away. Even the poor consolation of feeling that Diane regretted her choice had been denied him. De Brézé and his wife, for all the disparity of age, gave no indication to the outer world that the marriage was anything but supremely fortunate and happy. No scandal touched her, where scandalous gossip found its food everywhere among that dazzling company of guests. Long ago now, the nine-day wonder of the marriage had ended, and the old gibes about Beauty and the Beast been forgotten; she was the perfect, loving, dutiful wife; he, devotion itself in his own grim and uncouth way.

But this afternoon France, as he passed, heard an unbelievable dissension. It was an hour when few were likely to be in the vicinity of this suite of rooms. De Brézé's gruff, harsh voice was raised in anger; France could not quite catch the words, but the tone itself was furious, and he thought the King's name was mentioned, qualified by adjectives neither too courteous nor too loyal. It was no business now of his, but he waited breathlessly, unable to withdraw himself. Diane answered quietly, submissively, sweetly, with a little catch, however, in her breath; De Brézé, unmollified, continued to bluster and storm. When Diane spoke next, it was with an icy and contemptuous coldness which evidently goaded her husband to further madness. Was he indeed mad, then? There had been the tragedy of his father's life, when ungovernable anger—perhaps justified, but passing beyond the bounds of sanity in its ferocious vengeance—had taken two lives pitilessly, to the murderer's own undoing and almost the undoing of his House. Diane was apparently refusing with the long-ago, unforgotten hauteur to discuss or defend herself from some accusation. France could picture her look. Marriage, though she had accepted its conditions, had, then, not tamed her. Another angry retort from De Brézé—almost incoherent in his wrath, though the Secretary caught foul soldier words and oaths in a rushing torrent of semi-articulate words—and then the sound of a savage blow.

Behind the scenes, France knew, the masks which married folk of rank wore before a polite, watching world were sometimes flung aside. King Louis and Queen Anne, loving one another dearly, had often exchanged hot words, not always only in the privacy of their apartments. Well, it was no business of his. But a blow—Diane to be struck by this lame, hideous, deformed being who had snatched her ruthlessly and contemptuously from the lad who loved her—whom she had said she loved!

He had vowed himself always, in all circumstances, her Knight. This was intolerable. Prudence went to the wind. But as France advanced towards the closed door, it opened suddenly, and Diane came out. Her wonted pallor had left her; there was an angry flush on her cheeks, and from a tiny wound on the white, unveiled breast, welled drop and drop of blood. The wound was really very slight. Perhaps a ring on the coarse, angry hand that struck her had left this cut as evidence and witness.

Her usually inscrutable eyes were wide open, and blazing with fierce anger and resentment. Her bosom, so beautiful, so firm, so snowy-white, heaved with an excitement altogether foreign to the girl's nature. But when her eyes and those of France, all concern, met, she mastered herself with a supreme effort, and became again the Diane he had known in passing moods of pride or hardly controlled anger—a Diane cold as marble, cold as the moon which was to be one day her emblem.

"Monsieur, I did not know you to be an eavesdropper," she said frigidly, with the catch still in her voice. The words, not less because they held some truth, roused his own resentment and anger. He said, with almost equal coldness:

"Madame La Grant' Sénéchalle, 'twas by chance I heard in passing. Your secrets are safe in my keeping."

"'Tis no concern of yours, sir, what chances between man and wife. . . . Are we to be spied upon by—by—servants?"

"No; nor yet by one you asked to be ever your true Knight and friend—and I thought there might be need. . . . Madame, I see small harm is done; and, as you

say, 'tis no concern of mine if you care to be thrashed like a dog by the man you chose."

"And loved," she said, defiantly.

France was too angry, too agitated, to answer. A servant (well, in a sense he was) and eaves-dropping at the door of the woman he loved, at the door of the rival who had taken her from him! He bowed stiffly, and let her pass, which she did as stiffly, giving him just the slightest inclination of the proud, lovely head. Yet anger died suddenly in her eyes; there was born there the wistfulness that seemed to ask mutely for pity, for rescue, for help.

§4

France went angrily to his room. It was not late, and the sun was still fierce in the heavens; from his little window he could see a fragment of a drowsy world; two sentries languid at their posts, but smartening sharply as an officer drew near; a dog sleeping on gravel, but waking to snap at flies and fleas; some old, bedecked official of the royal retinue snoozing in a quiet garden corner under the shade of a great oak; two women working with listless automacy at spinning wheels in open doorways. He flung himself on his bed, furious, disheartened, very miserable and sad.

By and by his anger spent itself; after all, was it not like Diane to show herself outwardly content with the bed she had made to lie on? Let her go to the devil, if she was too proud to take help. He would leave no stone unturned to show her he was no mean servant any more. He would go to Bourbon, to Madame, to the King—to anyone with eyes to see his worth—and power to raise him—not Diane herself should taunt him with being mere eaves-dropping lackey. He took paper, a great, green-feathered quill, ink; and began to write furiously, letter after letter.

To Charles Caillette first, his assumed father, begging and even bribing him to search his memory more closely—to give him any other tiniest clue that might exist as to his birth. But he had small hopes from this letter, and, after reading and re-reading it, tore it up.

To the Constable de Bourbon, a deferential letter, full

of gratitude for past help and favours, but begging him earnestly to consider the immediate urgency of his plea for change and opportunities; "*Bis 'dat qui cito 'dat,*" he quoted at the end. To Madame La Grande—to Madame Suzanne—to the Duchess of Angoulême who had so much power with the King—and finally to his Majesty himself. He would use every means, pull every string; others of mean or obscure or doubtful birth had thrust themselves into notice and ultimate success and fame; why not he, with youth, looks, gifts, a score of accomplishments, to aid him? One must swallow dirt to do it.

Yet he was dissatisfied, and the floor was soon littered with torn and crumpled paper. The silent appeal in Diane's eyes could not undo what she had said and done—well, if to be Grant' Sénéchalle, and rich, and much honoured and sought after, had its price she must pay it.

He remembered one loyal friend, Alec, and longed to see his honest, freckled face, and to have one of the old, intimate talks with him; Alec had not been so far wrong in his summing up of women, though even he was not consistent. Though the young Scottish Guardsman was still in Italy, it would be easy to find messengers going thither who would carry a letter; France took his quill again, and poured out his grievances, ambitions, disillusions. Were there prospects now across the Alps? He would do anything, be anything, serve any master, to get away from the hum-drum rut of St. Vallier; in a new land could he be *someone*, and not nobody at all? While he wrote furiously there were footsteps on the stairs, a tapping at the door; he opened it, to find one of Bourbon's officers on the threshold. It was his old acquaintance, Baudemanche the archer, now promoted in the Duke's service. "Spine of St. Basil, Master Secretary," said Baudemanche with bluff good fellowship, "you are once more in luck's way, and my master sends me to tell you. He has spoken of you to his Majesty, for—Boyaux du Pape!—there was never such a one as our Constable for remembering service and old friends. To-night there is a little private supper for the King, and you

are to go and meet him. I warrant they will want to hear that fine voice of yours; Madame La Grande and Madame Suzanne often speak of it when music is on the carpet. For myself, 'tis an art I have no use for; give me twanging bows, whistling arrows and roar of cannon —the only concert in the world worth hearing. As for their church chants and love songs and all the rest of it, they may have 'em; they make me howl like a dog. . . . You are to go in with the sweets; yet I warrant a likely young blade like you, sir, will soon be a course or two higher. St. Denis's luck go with you. I know our young King well; a merry jest or two, a personable figure, a turn for song and verse, and he'll twist any way you want. But I give one warning; he is lavish but uncertain; do not trust all the promises he makes, but take all you can now from his hand. Birds in the bush don't come often to the spit."

Baudemanche was garrulous. He could not speak too often or at too much length about his master, the Constable; a master whom he would rather serve than all the monarchs or Popes in the world. The festivities at Moulins were nearing their end, and he did not regret it. They jogged along better without this great company. For himself, Baudemanche was never happier than when state was forgotten; give him a night of stars, seen through a tent gap under which good comrades sprawled, when at any moment the alarm might sound and some be comrades in death; give him the hard earth, even, and hard fare (but much to drink) and no worry about how a soldier chose to dress who fought well; good hunting, good fighting, good drinking, good looting, and plump women galore in a taken city—there was a man's life. France was a good soldier spoilt in the making; Baudemanche could not understand why one should want, all one's life, to keep the hands heaven meant for men's work busy with such female business as holding pens to parchments. Still—Spine of St. Basil!—it was no concern of his, and the Constable was no worse soldier for liking books, pictures, music, fine dress, and pretty things. The Duke was not a fool over such things like his Christian Majesty.

France learnt that, before the Court left Moulins,

a great parting banquet was to be given by King Francis; there were to be dancing, a masque, jugglers, jesters afterwards, to amuse the guests. Word had gone to Loches, to the Tournelles and elsewhere, for certain of the royal monsters, dwarves and fools to come down. Only the best were to be chosen and sent. Baudemanche thought himself that it was a world in which one need not look far for monsters and deformities, or fools; they were everywhere for the picking up; and if he were a great lord he would not pay folk to thrust their ugliness upon him, or insult him with their insolent follies at his own board. But doubtless great lords knew their business.

Baudemanche said a gruff, genial farewell, and went. Without further asking, France's chance had come.

CHAPTER XXII KING'S GOOSE—AND KING'S FOOL

"Monsouris of France, good claret cunners."

DUNBAR'S REMEMBRANCE.

IN one of the smaller staterooms of the vast Château France Caillette found himself in the presence of King Francis. When he was ushered in, supper was nearly ended; the Constable and his guests sat over fruit, dulcets and their wine. Five hundred lords and gentlemen belonging to the immense household kept up by the Duke had been appointed to attend the King during his visit, and some of these stood near the royal chair of state, under an azure cloth spangled with golden fleur-de-lys. At the blaze of light from torches and candles, the splendour of carefully chosen tapestries and pictures, the glitter of plate, above all at the high company he found himself thrust into, France gasped and grew discomfited. There were not many guests, but almost all bore famous names. Madame La Grande was there, and the King's mother—both of whom had held the Regency. Near the King, to France's astonishment and bewilderment, sat Diane, but her husband to his greater surprise was not present.

France waited, almost unnoticed, but himself notic-

ing all that passed. Already the guests were merry with wine, and talking freely; the King was in excellent humour; he turned frequently to the Grant' Sénéchalle, with more gallant *bonhomie* than pleased the observer; it irritated France to hear her laughter, clear as a bell, ring out now and then at some tale whispered in her ears. Was she playing a part? Was it a little privy revenge she took, her husband's harshness still rankling, still unforgiven?

France knew the King's reputation only too well. Women loving their lords feared him, and had cause to fear. Mothers warned their daughters to comport themselves with scrupulous care and seemliness whenever they came into the royal presence. Too many young and pretty wives, too many lovely girls, had rued the day when his eyes met theirs. A great King, charming, brilliant, gifted, gallant—and very, very dangerous.

But, cold as snow, Diane should be no less pure. He was filled with a strange and (he told himself) an unreasonable foreboding. The marriage—unless this were just a passing tiff—was not happy as he had thought, and Diane's pride so great that she might be ready to run risks to humiliate a husband who had struck her.

Well, it was not his concern—yet her eyes, catching his, though only for a flashing moment, seemed still to signal a desperate need for help which pride negatived.

His chain of gloomy thought was interrupted. The King wanted music; Monseigneur de St. Vallier's Secretary was to sing some of the songs of his own making which Madame had heard and been so pleased with. For a moment it seemed to France that his gift had deserted him—that, if he opened his mouth, no sound would come, or only sounds harsh and displeasing. The room hushed itself to listen, but for a minute he stood silent, with all watching him, and a hundred thoughts and emotions flocking through his mind. Torches and candles showed him not less distinguished than any there. Tall, graceful, bronzed and handsome, scrupulously and elegantly dressed, with the dark melancholy eyes, very big, which attracted notice everywhere, it might have been some young Prince standing

in the company of his equals, or inferiors. His likeness to Bourbon was to-night very marked.

But an eaves-dropping servant! The rejected and now scorned lover (unless her eyes meant more) of the beautiful woman to whom the King whispered, and at whose words she laughed! The reputed son of one of those Fools and grotesques they were raking through at Loches and elsewhere for the King's humouring and that of the King's guests, as a conclusion to the long pageantry of the christening! Yet he aspired to things high above him; truly "le cerf volant des aspirations" should have been his crest. . . .

An odd fragment of homely caution flashed, without reason, into his mind; it was the proverb Papa Caillette had once or twice quoted inconsequently: "*He that eats the King's goose must give back the feathers even a hundred years after.*" If Francis, within whose spell Diane ventured herself so recklessly to-night, drew her from her husband, let De Brézé take heed. Madame de Châteaubriant, pure once as she, had resisted his allurements in vain. . . . Let Diane, thinking she stood, take heed of falling. And for himself . . .

But the seeming inconsequence of the proverb gave him his cue. He had made one little song while riding with Diane in the Vivarais; they had come to a tiny hamlet in a valley among the lower mountains, where were a green-slimed pond, ducks and geese, and a small farmstead with sheep, horses, cattle byred and free. The verses had jogged themselves into his head with the jolting of the saddle; *proputty-prop, proputty-prop* —the clatter of their horses' hoofs had entered them, with the farmstead cries, the quacking of ducks, the hiss of geese. It was very light and catchy; he had polished it in his little room at St. Vallier, made music for it, and sung it to Diane in the flower-garden one eventide, to her merriment. They were just boy and girl then; she had joined, laughing, in the "quack, quack," "baa, baa," and other country sounds worked into his song; had stamped her little feet to mimic the clatter of the hoofs which ran through the music.

But he had never sung this anywhere else.

He began, in a low voice at first, but gradually

warmed to his task. Diane gave him a quick, bird-like glance, and her eyes fell. Suddenly confidence came to the singer; a simple thing, this beginning, but the mood for song came to him in a rush, and he was master of himself. Clear, sweet, pure, strong, the versed picture of that ride of a long-ago day rang out. In an under-current of thought he reflected: "I, if the son of a poor drunken Fool, have all these famous ears and eyes agog for me; they have waited on my pleasure." A little, pitiful triumph as sop to vanity; a trivial revenge. But once he had been less self-conscious and less vain, and not at all revengeful.

By and by he had his audience with him; all, perhaps, except Diane, who would not glance at him again. But he saw her face in profile, and on the eyelashes a tear glistened like a pearl. It was something if she were not too cold to suffer—as she had so often made him suffer. They were all joining now in the "*proputty-prop, proputty-prop,*" of her Breton palfrey's hoofs, and the hoofs of the great mare he had bestridden when the words first came to him. Stamp, stamp; clatter, clatter; *proputty, proputty, prop*. . . . They quacked —these great folk, warmed by wine—baa'd like sheep, mimicked with him the watch-dog's barking, mooed like cows, hissed like the hamlet geese that had waddled like fat Flemish wives after the riders. He had to sing the verses twice, thrice. The King himself, King Louis's "big boy" still for all folly, sang, stamped, quacked, baa'd, barked, hissed, when the chorus came.

Folly this—but it had won him the good will of his audience. They were ready for more. He sang next a song he had made about the war in the Milanais; then a love song; then one of springtime and the song of birds made by him a certain sunny morning on Loches ramparts; after these, certain old folk songs he had learnt, very sweet and melancholy, as if the tears of vanished lives were in them. With a yokel audience there might have been impatience by now, a noisy clamouring for the bawdy songs he had sung when he was with Papa Caillette on the road. How long ago those days—yet how they clung to him, like old mire which will not be shaken off.

Two or three of the guests made impatient movements, and an old lord, deep in his cups, mumbled irritably that this was spoon-food for babes. A Marshal of Baudemanche's kidney twisted fierce moustache-tips up scarred cheeks and cried for a drinking song. Well, there was the old song of Grégoire "*qui boit et met tout dans son ventre,*" Grégoire with the buttonless coat, and the thirty-buttoned nose. France was on the point of singing it, when a vision of Papa in drunken slumber checked him; he sang instead, to music of his own making, another topers' favourite which had a refrain something like this:

"*Wine I love, and singing to it,*
And the Latin Graces;
If I drink my throat'll do it
Better than Horatius.
Vintage spins our brains about
Dum vinum potamus;
Lauds to Bacchus let us shout,
Te Deum Laudamus."

But now most of the guests were clamouring for such songs as he had sung just before—songs pleasant, merry, innocent, wistful, haunting. Some folk songs in particular touched memories, carrying life-tired men and women back to childhood which years of camp and court, sin and folly, had put far away. Half drunken as were many of his audience, these springs of life were seen again as safe anchorages, green and happy gardens. And last of all he sang, by some inner prompting, an ancient song of Death, friendly and quiet-bringing, paying all debts, stilling all tumult, ending all pain, setting free all captives, giving rest to aching hearts after the myriad troubled heart-beats of life. It was based on an old legend of the countryside.

There was long silence when it ended. The King turned to Diane and whispered—their heads were still close when De Brézé came clumsily in. He gave a swift glance at his wife, who glanced back at him, with a forced smile, but eyes quite inscrutable. The Grand Seneschal, indifferent as to dress, had traces on his boots showing that they had not been changed, or cleaned

over-well, after a ride, perhaps, in the Park to still or control his rage.

The King, at the moment, called France to him, and De Brézé waited for audience. Very pleasant and friendly things the King said. He had been told of France already, and of his wish for wider opportunities of service; friends had spoken of him very highly. . . . He asked the young Secretary many questions. Some of the songs he knew, and he discussed these with an intelligent interest of which poor King Louis, for all his strenuous "D's" in the famous Motet, would have been incapable. His voice was singularly pleasant and friendly. France had made some of the songs himself —yes?—understood the making of verse, after fashion new and old? Knew Latin? Aye, and some Greek? The questions rattled out. France found himself searched by them as if a pack at some city gate were being probed into, the contents tossed out and weighed, before entrance was permitted. He answered modestly and diffidently. In a few quick minutes, with brown, quick, restless eyes searching him the while, he was submitted to close examination, on his knowledge, his accomplishments and his life. Some Italian, some Spanish (he could read both easily, speak and write them fairly), horsemanship, feats of arms . . . all the rest that he had acquired so strenuously in working or leisure hours at Loches, at St. Vallier, at Moulins in the great Library where Guillaume de Marillac had helped him. Then, while they talked, the King's hand went out with an impatient movement for despatches and letters—three or four—which De Brézé waited to deliver. "From Loches and Amboise, Sire; a courier came in, and there was no officer of your Majesty's but I at hand to take them." He made some gruff apology or excuse for coming late.

But Francis, eager at any new interest as a child with a new toy, held the missives for a minute unopened. He was asking France now about Papa Caillette, to the young Secretary's chagrin, but it was all engagingly friendly and sympathetic. His Majesty just remembered the Kitchen-Fool at Loches who was part of his vast legacy from King Louis. And he recalled a few of his

jests; a drunken, foolish, melancholy fellow to own as father(he implied this without saying it in as many words) but not altogether without parts. For the banquet he was giving before he left Moulins to his host and hostess and their principal guests, orders had gone to Chamberlains and Governors at the various Palaces to send down a company of Fools and monsters, so Baudemanche had already said. The King did not know whether Charles Caillette was likely to be among the lucky ones selected. He had had it in his mind to appoint a Fool in title, but the cares of State, and the Italian War, had put so much in the background. Perhaps he might even make his choice at the banquet.

He went on talking while he opened three of the despatches and bent his long nose—that longest nose in France—over them, an officer moving a candle so that his Majesty might see more easily. It was of Fools and the like he talked; famous Fools in history or of the day—Dagonet, Yorick, Klaus Karr, Gonnella; Kurtz von der Rosen, Le Glorieux, Scogan, English John; Daft Jock, and Bute and Spark; Querno, Britonio and Baraballo, Ostis—— On every subject this young King seemed to have knowledge, and to be proud of showing it, but France suspected from one or two things he said that this knowledge did not go very deep, and he had an easy way of quitting a topic before his ignorance revealed itself too openly. The third despatch was long, and took some time to read, especially as he carried on the conversation and cross-questioning while studying it. In leisurely fashion he opened the fourth. Interspersed with other writing, were lists of names. The King read out, not loudly, but in a voice that France could hear: "For his Majesty's pleasure: to be sent to Monseigneur the Constable's Château of Moulins: *Triboulet, Polite, Caillette*——"

There were three or four other names of dwarves and monstrosities and tumblers from the *Salle des Fous* at Loches.

France glanced towards Diane, but her eyes were cast down, and she gave no sign. King Francis said: "Your father's name, then, is on the list my Governor of Loches is sending me," and he smiled very pleas-

antly. "I will not forget you, be sure of it," he added, and a friendly smile and sign gave France his dismissal.

His heart was deep in his rosetted shoes when he withdrew.

CHAPTER XXIII THE KING DOFFS HAT TO PAPA CAILLETTE

"Wise men and fooles all one end makes,
God's will be done, who gives and takes."

A NEST OF NINNIES.

§1

FRANCE was cheered not a little by a chance encounter with the King a day or two before the arrival of the bizarre and motleyed guests. He was in the great Library, where his old friend, Guillaume de Marillac, sought as much refuge as he might from the noise and irksomeness of the celebrations. As a grey spider its web, the Duke's Librarian and Secretary loved better the quiet retreat among dumb and friendly books than a glaring world which was now turned clamorous and strident, with trumpets, voices, marchings, artifices of fire. He rumpled his hair in distraction at the constant interruption to his peace.

France Caillette and the old Librarian were happy over a bundle of illuminated missals and other books and manuscripts which had just arrived from Italy, when King Francis entered. He greeted France in very friendly fashion, and then, turning to Marillac, asked him for certain ancient books on navigation, and others on the art of war. The Librarian was agitated and confused; he had but luke-warm admiration for his King, loving better old ways and days than these topsy-turvey ones into which Time's besom swept him, and more than once France, knowing every nook and corner, had to come to his rescue. It was a fortunate chance, and the King studied his young informant with a new interest. By and by, leaving the Librarian at his own task, Francis turned to the subject of verse, in the writing of which he fancied himself an adept. He unrolled a sheet of parchment where dashes supplied the place of certain rhymes he wished to fit in. Here

France was able to give him help also. The royal verses were not very good.

A fortunate meeting, thought France; whatever his parentage, the King might henceforth value him for himself. His Majesty had been stuck mid-way in some verses which began:

"Celle qui fust de beauté si louable
Que pour sa garde elle avoit une armée——"

He jotted down several of France's suggestions; *"semblable," "aymee," "estimee," "blesme."* . . . Not very brilliant; however, the King was out of his impasse. The Court amused itself a good deal in spare hours by capped verses and competitions in rhyme. But, when the gay, butterfly figure had gone, Marillac, rumpling his hair wildly, grumbled that Kings like cobblers should stick to their own lasts; this splendid and vain young monarch essayed everything, was always pestering him for information which he could bring out at opportune moments in order to impress folk with the idea that he was omniscient, though it was others' brains he made use of.

And then Loches, Tours, the Tournelles, Amboise, Blois, tumbled out their rarest freaks and follies into Moulins.

Into the great courtyard of the sumptuous yet austere and decorous Château poured this chosen rabble from all the royal nests of ninnies. Dwarves, distortions, oddities, jugglers and tumblers, Fools of every kind and kidney, came babbling, shouting, singing in. Big-heads wagged over the brink of the tumbrils that brought them. Bagpipes wheezed and squeaked; the hollow smack of bladders spoilt autumnal silences; half a dozen dialects contended, shrill or hoarse. Two female Fools were in the excited company. With them were frilled dogs, monkeys, parrots grey and green and pink screaming angrily.

There was Triboulet, with his melancholy visage, his hump, his long ears; he hugged a rebec to his long, flat stomach.

There was Hippolyte whom they called Polite.

And there was—Papa!

France was crossing the court when the strange company entered, bringing all Moulins Château to windows and doors.

And, before he could escape, Papa Caillette, a squat, bubukled, slobbering jelly of emotion, with ready tears in the corners of his little, pig-like eyes, had clambered clumsily from the cart—fallen in a heap and recovered himself painfully—and was embracing him in a bear-like hug. "My son, my long-lost son!"

To add to France's chagrin and discomfiture, the King, with a small company, hawks on gloves, rode past at that moment, but halted to see and laugh at the invasion. Near his Majesty were De Brézé and Diane. The King was speaking to her, gaily, but in low tones. The Grand Seneschal said, in a gruff voice, which France heard plainly: "Is that his father? By God's Splendour, wife, 'tis the prodigal son and not the fatted calf which is like to be slain for merriment." But Diane answered not a word.

France, hot and furious and ashamed, submitted to the clumsy caresses; was beslobbered with drunken kisses. In one hand his father had clutched his marotte, but had flung it down; a bottle rolled in the dust where it had fallen; the mouth of another stuck from a wide pocket in his belled tunic of red and yellow and green.

"We have had a —hic—miserable journey, my son, but 'tis ever a hard road to Paradise, St. Gatier and St. Julian be praised, we are safely here. Stomachs of little fishes! What a Palace!" The pig-like eyes tried to contain all the splendour in range of them; how vast and noble a Château for a subject to possess—for a lesser subject to feast upon and visit! These great folk could not be merry without Fools' aid. Nevertheless Papa was not happy; the jolting of the roads and forest tracks had been horrible, his stomach was in his head all the way, and even good drink could not always keep down. It was an insult to have sent him, the King's Kitchen-Fool, with such a crew. A parrot had nipped his calf, a monkey had scratched him, and the drums of his ears were at bursting-point through the din of Triboulet's bagpipes. Why Triboulet should have been

sent at all passed all sane comprehension, but that Fool would soon find his level when they came before the King. For a month of Sundays Papa would not be able to use his ears comfortably after those screeching pipes which, by the Chemise of Chartres, had most certainly been played into them maliciously. Trust a fine rich cheese like Moulins to bring such maggots at Triboulet, if people were stupid enough to invite them.

France looked to his father's comfortable housing. Easy to see that the old disreputable toss-pot was in reality less confident of his success in the coming trial of wits than he pretended; there was something pitiable in this unwonted ebb of self-esteem. He looked ill and worried. His face was yellow as a saffron cake, blotched and puffy; his little nose, redder than ever, blossomed like a tip of Aaron's rod. Not drink only made his hands shake, his legs tremble. He stopped several times, wheezing and coughing, and more than once France had to put his arm round him to support him. An odd new tenderness swept over him suddenly; so feeble, since their last meeting, had grown the man whose cruelties he had once dreaded. All the same, he wished he were well away when all went so famously with the King. The elder Caillette's depression yielded a little to the abundant hospitality of Moulins. As ever, he had just invented such jests and sallies as had never entered even his fertile head before; France must listen; and had perforce to pleasure his father by tactful grins and guffaws. Really, a dismal business; yet there was a certain tincture of courage in this refusal of an ageing man, beaten by time and broken by dissipation and ill-health, to acknowledge his defeat. At the coming trial of wits the man to be feared secretly (however he might assume or feel contempt) was his hated rival, Triboulet. He shot out a thick upper lip at him; puffed, as if to blow him into the obscurity of nothingness. There was one very ingenious little scene he had planned; he did not knew whether it could be managed, but a certain friend of his, a stage-hand brought from the Tournelles, approved of it highly, and was willing to give his aid; though, to be sure, Papa would rather France could have helped him as in the old days. This Bouteloup

had some old grudge against Triboulet. It was a mock tragedy they staged. Lots had been drawn as to the order in which the performers were to give their turns, and Triboulet (there was some trickery, no doubt) was to come on first. The troupe from Loches were to give their performance on a stage representing a street with the grim Château towering in a background of painted Rouen canvas. Near the conclusion of Papa's performance, Bouteloup was to enter, and, in the course of conversation, describe Triboulet's performance, and repeat, with gross additions and imbecilities, some of his more inane jests. Papa illustrated the way in which he would receive this report; his countenance twisted and contorted with emotions, incredulity, amazement, blank incapacity to follow Triboulet's witticisms. The blotched face, like mottled, yellow gutta-percha, expressed almost without words a man falling from surprise to melancholy, and so through dismal stages to profoundest dejection. His plan was to end in a faint at Bouteloup's feet—or, better, in some form of seizure which soap (after the usage of Paris beggars) would help to make real. Bouteloup was to rush off the stage in alarm, and Caillette proposed then to hang himself from a neighbouring lanthorn. On Bouteloup returning with a bottle of spirits to put to his friend's lips, Papa would come suddenly to life, and set the audience on a roar by saying that rather than endure such stuff he had made away with himself; but, finding himself by accident in hell, whose most exquisite torture was to have to listen interminably to such jests and tales as Triboulet's, he had decided to return.

An ingenious if cumbrous plan; he had mapped it out to the last detail, and had devised a mock hanging which was nothing less than a stroke of genius. He explained the principle of it to France. The noose, instead of being fitted round the neck as would appear, was nothing but a slack rope collar revealed at the critical moment by pulling down his tunic, which was looped at the back for the real rope to pass through, so that he could slide to earth without injury. His dull little eyes brightened as he described the mechanism of his device.

Before France left him, Papa was nearly his old self. By the stomachs of a hundred and one great whales, he would do that fellow Triboulet yet; the King of France should doff cap to him, as the greatest of all Fools that ever lived. "Never fear, lad, your old Papa will never let you down. Triboulet was bragging on his way hither that when there was any famous festival and they wanted folks to go, he was always asked to crack his jokes. 'And,' said I, 'when you do that folks always go!' But he was too dull to see it. . . . I am a match for a dozen such rascals. . . . When I am King's Fool, France, you need have no fear for your future; it is assured. But be wary, lad; was not that lass chatting with his Majesty when I came in the girl you set eyes at at St. Vallier? A pretty bundle, by St. Gatier, but she treated you scurvily, as I said; take no heed to her; if you must needs have one, there are millions of fishes in the seas, but women at best are spoil-works——"

"She is not for me," said France uncomfortably. "'Twas her husband, the Seneschal of Normandy, that rode close to her."

"The old hunchback that should be himself in our *Salle?* Aye—but she and the King were chatting, and I saw his eyes. Meddle not with the King's goose, France. 'Tis an old wise saying, that he who eats the King's goose must give back the feathers even a hundred years after. Have a care, France, have a care."

§2

But Papa had bad news to deliver, though the weariness and excitement of the day made him forget it until France asked after his old, staunch, loving friend, Alec Maclean. After the King's return and Bourbon's supersession, Alec had stayed on with his company of the Guard in Italy. The country was in disorder; at a little village in the Milanais—Papa forgot the name, but thought it was dubbed after some Saint, or more possibly, in a land so vile and dangerous, some devil—the populace had fallen on a squadron of Guardsmen riding through, and Alec had been treacherously slain. He had heard it from a butterman at Loches, who had

heard it from a customer of Madame Belatte of Montbazon, who had heard it from an English lady staying in the village; one Ennise, or some such name; and this said lady, who was something to do with the Queen's Court, and had come with the late Queen to France, was heartbroken over it, and repented bitterly having used the soldier ill before he marched away. "'Tis the lot of all, France," went on his father, remembering suddenly to wipe an eye, "and I should have told you sooner had it not been for such great matters weighing on me. Up heart, lad! Kings and even Fools must die, though I hope 'twill be many a long day before the Eternal sees his old Fool Papa Caillette come cracking his good jokes into heaven. By the stomach of Jonah's great fish, Papa may one day be Fool-in-Chief to their lordships the Holy Saints!" In pity of himself, ending even so gloriously, he wept in earnest—tears of water and of wine.

France was dazed at the news, reaching him casually and circuitously. He left his father greatly cheered, but he himself sat for an hour or more on his bed-edge, thinking, thinking. No one now in all the world—except Diane, and she already lost to him—whose death could have meant a greater loss. Bitter news this to hear, and a thousand memories came thronging, of long talks and little friendlinesses and brotherly loyalties; impossible that he should never hear again Alec's pleasant burred speech, clasp his great hand in friendship, see the honest freckled face he loved, and the ever-true eyes looking into his own. Even Alec's little homilies under which he had sometimes chafed—how eagerly would he hear a thousand! Italy the insatiable, "the Frenchman's grave," had taken into its sultry dust this gallant young Scottish servant of France. . . . He got wearily into bed at last, but sleep, for hours, would not come to him; he tossed from side to side, and when he did sleep, in broken spells, it was to dream troubled dreams, and start into wakefulness with Alec's name on his lips. He woke once thus with the conviction that Alec was not dead, but was in danger and had been calling for aid. . . . Certainly there was knocking at his door, loud and impatient, and the calling of his

name. He rose, rubbing his eyes; day had dawned, but the light in the room was still tinged with grey, and the air very fresh and chill. Again the knocking. He sprang out of bed. Frightened servants were calling him to come at once. Gasping out explanations, they took him to his father's room.

Papa Caillette, a hillock of half-uncovered flesh, lay huddled on the floor. Close to him lay a small stool, over-turned. From a beam a rope dangled; a ridge on the neck told the tale, or half of it. They had cut the rope too late.

An accident, no doubt; melancholic *souffre-douleur* as he was, Papa loved life too well to take it with deliberation; he had enjoyed too well for that his own tale of the man who hanged himself round the waist because a rope round the neck made it difficult to breathe. His mind filled with the coming contest which meant so much to him, he had evidently risen early to rehearse the closing episode of his performance that was to put Triboulet to final confusion. But something had gone wrong. The stool had slipped from under him, the rope, instead of running loosely through the loop, had twined itself round the neck, and he had hanged himself in earnest. He was at his last gasp and gurgle when they found him.

He was buried at Moulins on the day before the contest of Fools at the King's going-away banquet. France followed, leading the mourners—a motley crew of grotesques, Triboulet among them striving to hide satisfaction under a lugubrious countenance, more laughable than open laughter. Just as the little procession with its torches and banners drew near the grey walls of the church King Francis passed on horseback with a gay company.

The King doffed his plumed and jewelled cap to his Kitchen-Fool, Papa Caillette.

§3

France had no heart to go to the banquet, but Guillaume de Marillac, who was there, and contemptuous of the whole matter, gave a full report. A dismal business, this competition of mediocre wits and God's

physical and mental failures. Such a jumble of contortions, monstrosities, abortions had surely never been seen on any stage of the world. . . . The Fools were lamentable. Every tale told, every jest cracked, every riddle propounded and answered, was to be found in the old books in Moulins Library—some were older than Greece and Rome. Triboulet had failed miserably. The King was bored, and left early, without any decision being made. He was heard to say that his realm was to be congratulated, since it held no Fool worth the name.

Marillac had scarcely finished his tale—they were chatting in the Library—when the King entered, alone. He paid France much attention, asking him more questions, and seeming pleased at his replies; he tested him in various ways on his knowledge. At the end he paid a compliment to Papa at which his dead Kitchen-Fool might almost have pricked great ears with astonishment and pleasure in his grave. A jester, the King thought, of perhaps better wit than others, if somewhat crude and unpolished; since his tragic death his Majesty had had reports of him, his stories and songs and antics. He could not have been worse than those who had wearied his guests with their puerilities the other night. They should have come from the royal *Salles des Fous* in an Ark. But his good Majesty King Louis of happy memory had odd tastes.

"I do not recall your father's clowning," went on the King, "though I knew his name."

"And have seen him, Sire," said France, impulsively. He instantly regretted having spoken, but the King snapped him up.

"When?"

"When your Majesty was a boy at Amboise; we played before your Majesty in the court of the Ste. Barbe Inn. You were with your tutor, Sire; and gave me a gold angelot."

"Faith of a gentleman! Did I so? I do remember some such day; and you that lad. . . . Fortunes have changed for both." He smiled his easy, friendly smile that won hearts so easily and cheaply. "I will see that you are not forgotten."

The next day the Court left Moulins, a vast cavalcade, filling country roads and lanes with colour and bravery. France and his master returned to St. Vallier soon after. Once more the dull round; and to brighten it but the promise of a fickle King, and Bourbon's half-promise which the King's promise would doubtless cancel. His father was dead, and the unhappy memories were smoothed away as death smoothes the wrinkles of troublous, fevered life away. And Alec, brother and more than brother. . . . That was a loss he could not bear to think upon; the very sun was darker for it. . . . And Diane hiding unhappiness from the world under a mask of sweet devotion—and this King who would not forget him whispering to her, riding with her, his restless, dangerous, smiling eyes dallying with her beauty while her old and ugly husband lowered darkly in the background. But he would think no evil of Diane, and reproached himself for even the shadow of such a thought.

Within a fortnight, a missive corded and tasselled in the royal crimson and gold came to St. Vallier; for France Caillette.

King Francis had not forgotten.

The lines blurred; angry tears started to France's eyes. He was appointed Fool-in-title to his Most Christian Majesty, in recognition of his abilities, and of the services of his late father, whose name the King wished to perpetuate in his *Salles des Fous*.

Kings rule by hereditary right—it was his whim, then, that cap and bells should pass like crowns, marottes like sceptres! Fierce resentment trembled in the fingers that penned compliance with the order to repair to the Tournelles, in Paris, and had perforce to pen also gratitude for this condescension. So high had fortune lifted him.

He paced the little garden for an hour before he could control himself sufficiently to tell the Count. But St. Vallier had already heard. His Majesty had graciously consented to let France come now and then to Dauphiny if there were need. This business of the loan was his Majesty's affair also. The Count wished him well—and the fact that there seemed no intended irony in his

congratulations added to the bitterness of France's chagrin. To these great folk of the earth, even the friendliest, he was of commoner clay than theirs, and cheaper.

CHAPTER XXIV THE KING OF FOOLS AND MONKEYS

Olivier le Daim: Allons! riez, dansez! le roi
le veut ainsi.
LOUIS XI. CASIMIR DELAVIGNE.

§ I

WITH a heavy heart France started for Paris. Beaten, humiliated, all life's beauty and interest turned suddenly into drab sordidness, he had a mind to make an end in earnestness as his father, in making death a jest, had made an end. What more did life hold for him? He cursed the gifts, the opportunities, the effort which had brought him in a circle, like one lost in a dark forest, to his starting-place. And the Count of St. Vallier—Romain Maubert too, for that matter, and even humbler folk—had offered him congratulations.

The King's Chief Fool! To be Fool greater than any within the realm was the destiny to which bright stars, flattering stars, lying stars, had brought him. His hand had itched once for the sword; smiling Fortune had put it in a bauble. Diane had told him once the horoscope taken at her birth; it was full of cryptic things, which neither he nor she could puzzle out—she was to save a snowy head, lose a golden head, and it ended:

> " *Mais en saulvant comme en perdant*
> *Pleurs versera icelle enfant*
> *Cependant resjouissez-vous*
> *Pour ce quy gouvenera tous.*"

Success at least in the end; that which her proud will wanted most in the end. . . . Already part of her ambition was attained; at a cost. For him, success itself spelt uttermost failure.

He spent a day or two at Loches during a brief holi-

day after leaving St. Vallier and taking up his new duties. The grim old fortress drew him by an odd and inexplicable fascination, but now new ghosts were added to the old; above all, he missed Alec's always-friendly face, his voice, his hand-clasp. Strangers shared the vast bed on the edge of which he and Alec had so often talked the hours out; a stranger sat in Alec's old seat near the great fire-place in the Guard-room. He dreaded Paris, and it was a humiliation, he told himself now, even to serve in any capacity such a King as Francis, a man without morals, without heart, without loyalty, fickle and utterly superficial. . . . Yet the King had meant him well, and thought he was doing him honour. To aim at greatness—to work for it, gaining back in the interest of the struggle a little of life's lost happiness and incentive—and to end as buffoon and Fool!

One evening his depression was so heavily upon him that he had almost decided to make a finish to it all. There was a deep, sedgy pool in the marshes of the Indre where this would be easy; a plunge, perhaps a struggle to force himself not to swim—but stones might help—and then, the world and its disappointments shut out in green oblivion, its long bitterness over with its brief and illusive joys. Or his dagger which Diane had once given him on a fête day—or—or poison, at the making of which these Italians who had treacherously slain his friend were such adepts. He could gather no fresh news of Maclean, though this was one of the reasons that brought him to Loches; the ghostly army of gallant dead beyond the Alps must, then, have claimed him.

Despair in his heart, France passed under the grim Château; better, surely, an end. None of his prayers seemed answered; they beat against heavens of brass. But in an alley of the town a figure in grey-brown, bearded, rope and crucifix swinging, emerged from a mean doorway as he passed. It was the late Queen's good Confessor, Yves de Maheuc, whose sandalled feet had doubtless brought him stealthily hither on some errand of pity; this was a slum where the meanest and vilest herded. Not recognizing him, the Franciscan passed in the growing twilight with a gentle inclina-

tion of the head. A sudden and uncontrollable impulse led France to hurry after him and introduce himself. Before they had walked together many yards his story was out. He was crushed, hopeless. Diane, Alec—even his father whom he could lose most easily, yet had been of a sort his friend—had gone; life was too heavy for him; all he had been at such pains to acquire was now worse than valueless. Yves de Maheuc turned on him eyes usually soft but now penetrating. They were deep-set; the face, with its light-brown beard more heavily flecked now with grey, showed voluntary but perhaps also forced asceticism.

"So you have lost all, and come to the bottom," he said sternly, "and have nothing left to value, and were going—whither?"

Except to the river-road, the alley was an impasse, and the Franciscan was shrewd in reading faces and thoughts. France's silence and dropped head answered him.

"You have no Te Deums left to God when only Brother Sun, Sister Water—all the good Brotherhood and Sisterhood He gives to all men freely are left, and the vanities of the flesh and world, its passions and pomps and powers, which are for some, may not be for you also? Is it not written that the poor in spirit, they that mourn, the meek, those reviled even and persecuted, are blessed? Come with me."

Stern, as France had never hitherto seen him, he led the way silently back into the Château, and, taking a lanthorn, entered the dark cachot of the drawbridge, the unhappy lad following him in perplexity. The Franciscan flung a wave of dancing, yellow light on an inscription, scratched in Spanish by some forgotten prisoner on the stone. It read in English—

"The best of remedies in every ill
Is still the good within that none may kill."

He led France back into the court, now lit by moonlight. His face had lost its severity, and changed to an extraordinary kindness; France knew why Queen Anne, so good at heart, loved this man, and why the poor and oppressed at Loches adored him. "Brother,"

he said, "little Brother,"—but France stood two inches taller than he—"'tis a wise old proverb that you must not show half-done work to children and fools. When you are older, and a man" (France knew he smiled) "you may see how God's tale for you runs, and find some plan in it; strive to be brave, take up with a heart what He gives you, and if it be only to gibe, and make sport, and be head of Folly's kingdom, do it to your uttermost best—to God's glory, and Our Lady's, and the Saints'. In his company St. Francis had surely one Fool, Brother Ruffino, who played many foolish and mad pranks, but he was loved no less for his honest mirth-making and folly. Would you have life like a festal day at Loches, when they bring out the Virgin's girdle, and the streets are full of maids bearing roses, and roses flung down to walk upon? But it was not over roses our dear Lord walked to His doom and our help. Over stones and cruel, bitter briars He walked. Follow the good within, for that is God even in the pitifullest monster you may company with and be in charge of; even in the beasts and birds, who are our brothers and our little sisters." He raised his hand in blessing and smiled, and the soft pad of his sandals on cobbles passed from hearing.

§2

So France took up his post and burden; King, as the phrase and title went, of *Ribauds*, and Governor of Fools, Monkeys and Little Servants. He stayed at the Tournelles first, and later his duties took him to this Palace and that, in Paris and the provinces. More than once he was called to sing before the gay company at the new Palace of the Tuileries which Louise was building to suit her caprice. It was there he heard, not very long after the festivities at Moulins, that the baby Count of Clermont was dead, and the Constable had soon to mourn the frail, loving little wife who had been more than glory to him, more than riches, more than all his world. She died at Châtelherault just when the trees were in their full spring glory, and was buried away from all the green and coloured brightness, in the grey Abbey of Souvigny, seven miles from Moulins.

Set on his pedestal as King of Fools, France thought sometimes of an old saying of his father's that a man on a high building sees all below as dwarves—who see him as a dwarf against the sky. He was apart from this glittering world while mingling with it, amusing it, belonging to it. Between the squabbles, the pettinesses, the loves and hates, of Fools and Princes, how slight a difference! A clown jumped through a hoop for a coin, an ape climbed a pole for a cake; a lord for offices and pensions. The King's lecheries and amours were those of the lower beasts in the *Salle des Fous*. A Fool-in-Chief was privileged; France's tongue had license, his ears were his own and nailed to no post like his unhappy father's. Once he had been a man among other men. Now he was no more than a clock in a room, deaf and dead, that did not matter or count if one told secrets before it—though it could tell the passing hour, and tick through silences, and tickle ears with a tune.

It was hard to keep manhood, and find remedies in "the good within—which none might kill."

His office was no sinecure; the strange company scattered throughout the Palaces needed much supervision and work. In dark, unwholesome dens lurked forgotten, human wreckage of old years. France tried to make their lot happier, and be their friend. Deformity and ill-treatment had blinded many to kindness —had God been kind, setting them apart from others, branding them as different and soul-less and unclean? Indeed it was strange that He, Who could do all things, and make men beautiful and sane and whole, should choose to deck the noble cathedral of His world with human abortions and monstrosities, like those hideous gargoyles which had frightened a little playing-boy long ago. Many were jealous and splenetic, resenting France's promotion, misunderstanding all he did or said. Yet often he was amazed at the patience with which indignities and suffering were borne; at odd, staunch friendships, ill-assorted loves, and courage sometimes of a stouter fibre than that of plumed knights. Virtues grew in rock, in filth, in darkness, among some who, amid indignity and hardship, had held fast to the good within themselves.

He came across Triboulet. The fellow was a wild cat now for spleen and spitefulness; there was no making friends. His eyes gleamed malice, and, if he could not evade an order, he obeyed sullenly, and more than once broke into open, violent, spluttering revolt. France was warned that the man was treacherous and dangerous, and had been heard to utter venomous threats against the life of the new Master-Fool who had slipped into the shoes he had hoped to wear. But mere swelling words are but bladders filled with wind. Triboulet, as he grew older, grew also more hideous and repulsive; his dress of blue and white stripes, stretched very tightly over his ill-shapen, humped body, emphasized his ugliness; sometimes he decked it with ribbons showing the colours of high-born ladies whose attractions gave them influence with the King. He was always at some scheme to curry favour.

Before he had been long in the royal service France found to his disgust that Triboulet had been partially consoled by the tit-bit of a particularly nauseous office. He was chief purveyor to his Majesty of beautiful girls and women, to supplement the Queen, Madame de Châteaubriant, and other ladies at the Court with whom the fickle taste of that famous "hunter of stags and women" was not satisfied. Occasionally Francis sought his own adventures among the lower and middle-class populace, roaming the streets at night in a grey habit devised for these nocturnal enterprises. And once Triboulet boasted that the King had taken him as companion; the Fool's head was a map of stews.

The new Fool-in-Chief thanked his stars that at least he had been spared dirty work like this.

§3

His own duties, in addition to the supervision of his bizarre and difficult "subjects" of the tiny realm he ruled, as Kings of Yvetôt ruled, within a vaster kingdom, honoured but laughed at—brought him into frequent touch with the Sovereign. It was not merely to crack jokes, to say smart and cutting things (how his head ached over the devising of them!) or in singing, that he found himself called into service, but he aided

the King in ways which in other conditions he might have enjoyed. At the dull petty Court at Cognac when he was born some malignant fairy must have dropped into the broth of Louise d'Angoulême's little son inimical herbs. Everything he had and did was spoilt, bearing within itself seeds which made all ineffective. He was handsome, yet the nose was ludicrously long, the legs out of proportion, the stomach too protuberant though small, the shoulders and arms excessive. He was brave, but in smaller things a coward. He had a love for art, for verse, for music, but his taste was imperfect, and his own attempts were mediocre. He knew something of everything—yet not enough of anything to make his judgment quite sound, his opinion very valuable. A King with some touch of genius, but genius infertile, unfinished, incomplete.

Immense vanity made him anxious to shine everywhere, in sport, among women, in war, amidst artists and poets and musicians—but this he could not achieve unless other brains were at his service. Here France was invaluable. The King's Fool, of a model very different from those that had satisfied the homely taste of Louis, supplied his King's deficiencies; he knew, or could find, such information as was needed to impress on the world the omniscience of his master. A little secret coaching, and Francis was prepared to meet, and often astonish, ambassadors, admirals, travellers, engineers, artists, and the experts of all grades and nations. France Caillette could re-touch a picture, prune and end a poem, make unmusical music musical. He could prepare a speech. He found some amusement in all this. Occasionally the King would cap verses with him, or learn stories to be retailed in apt moments as original. Some guessed that, although Francis was no dullard, the King's most brilliant efforts were rarely his own.

The Count de St. Vallier's Secretary knew something of finance, of estates and their transmission, of genealogies, and of certain legal processes and formalities. He was soon to find that his training and experience served him in good stead. The King was plagued with lawyers, whom he disliked; their jargon puzzled him,

and yet he had need to master some of it in view of a great law-case which was soon to divide French society into two camps. His Majesty was frank. Now that the Duke of Bourbon's little son and wife were dead, an opportunity had arisen for the re-opening of an old, vexed question about the estates of the wealthiest and most powerful subject in the realm; an opportunity which Louise d'Angoulême meant to seize.

In her shameless passion, she gave Bourbon, point-blank, alternatives; to marry her, now that he was free, or to give up the heritage which had come to him through Suzanne, which she maintained were *fiefs feminins*, due to her in virtue of her mother, Marguerite de Bourbon. The Constable ridiculed her impudent pretensions which would have robbed him of Moulins, the Bourbonnais, Clermont, his Duchy of Auvergne, and the greater part of his fortune; and he rejected her proposal of marriage with a contempt conveyed in words so scathing that the venomous fury of the Duchess was concentrated henceforth on his utter ruin. Madame La Grande was on his side, and his own right had been established by royal decrees in the two previous reigns; he was popular with soldiers and people, the nobility were jealous of any encroachment on their privileges, and the King and Government were in bad favour owing to the exactions following on the ruinous Italian Wars. There had been many recent disturbances; Louise's ally, the Chancellor Duprat, had incensed all classes by new methods of taxation; the soldiers were still unpaid; the King himself was finding it difficult to raise money, and had scandalized the religious public by carrying off from Touraine the great silver trellis which Louis XI had given to St. Martin-de-Tours, and from Picardy the four golden Apostles in Laon Cathedral. Francis was sufficiently sage to feel the temper of his people, and, if he was in any doubt, the reception of certain plays directed against him and his mother should have made him realize the danger at this juncture of offending his most powerful subject. One of these plays was even directed against his amours—with a girl of middle-class birth—and Francis had small liking for ridicule turned against himself. He and Bourbon—

whom he had dubbed "Monsieur Quick-Tempered"—were not on good terms, but there had been no open rupture, and there was no sharp spur of fierce love or fiercer hatred to urge him to an infamous injustice. . . .

And then Death, which had befriended Louise so often, removing Louis and his Queen, her enemy—robbing them of heirs—taking away Bourbon's brothers, son, wife—befriended her again, almost by miracle.

Paris bellmen cried the news that Anne de Beaujeu, Duchesse de Bourbon, daughter of King Louis XI and one time Regent of France, who was the Constable's most powerful friend, was dead.

And, though there were law and justice in France, with an unscrupulous woman, a corrupt Chancellor, and a vain, frivolous and weak King ruling the realm, law and justice were to be bought and sold. . . . After long litigation, the Constable lost his case.

He had borne with an assumed indifference slight after slight; the gradual loss of pensions and offices, the open neglect or half-veiled hostility of his Sovereign, the promotion of favourites to commands which he had merited and had even held. With the same superb, cold, indifferent hauteur he withdrew quietly to the estates which were to be taken from him, and lived there quietly among his own people.

But shrewd old King Louis had said once, speaking of his secretiveness and taciturnity, that stagnant waters were very dangerous; they affrighted him.

CHAPTER XXV ST. VALLIER KEEPS BAD COMPANY

Ross: I am so much a fool, should I stay longer,
It would be my disgrace and your discomfort.
I take my leave at once.

MACBETH, ACT IV, SC. III.

§1

THE King started on the first stage of his journey to Lyons, *en route* again for Italy, on the day when the verdict went finally against Bourbon; this was the 23rd of August, 1523. There were some just and honourable judges in France, but Duprat and Louise,

who was to be Regent again, during her Cæsar's absence, snapped fingers at legality and equity. Francis, it was rumoured, had said in relief, hearing that so great a Prince who rivalled his own greatness had fallen, "At last I am King!" Bourbon said nothing, and withdrew quietly to Moulins among his own people, waiting events. But not idly. Spies were sent down from Paris—two gentlemen in favour at the Court, coming as guests and friends. These stagnant waters that showed no external signs of what might lie beneath were not to be lightly trusted. All Louise's emissaries saw were a hospitable host, reserved but courteous; a country gentleman, excusing himself for riding alone a great deal, and spending much time in his library with his Secretary, Guillaume de Marillac.

What they missed seeing was the much studying of maps and military treatises; the rapid glances, on his solitary expeditions, at roads, paths, defiles, woodland tracks; the examination of Chantelle, that well-nigh impregnable fortress, and its armament. Fifteen pieces of artillery were mounted on its battlements, but there was nothing new in that. The days had gone when feudal lords could hold their castles against the King's horses and the King's men in the heart of the King's realm.

They did not hear armourers at work in a lonely smithy, beating into the Constable's sword a new and sinister motto: "*Omnis spes in ferro.*" They did not see fingers busily at work embroidering on a banner another motto: "*Victoire ou Mort!*"

The Count of St. Vallier was in Paris when the result of the trial became known; he had his own grievances, for the spleen of the King's mother directed itself not only against the Constable but against his friends. St. Vallier refused in high dudgeon an inferior position which the King offered him in the new Expedition (the loss of Bicocca had not been forgotten), and withdrew himself to a lonely house he had on the Rhône, to sulk and grumble in privacy. He had a suspicion that prying eyes were on him in the capital, and his affairs at St. Vallier were in a tangle now that it seemed hopeless to expect repayment of the "mountains of écus" (it was his own phrase) he had been at such pains, with

France Caillette's help, to raise as a loan to the King. He missed every day his capable Secretary, who had everything at his finger-ends.

Diane told France this. She came for a few days, before the trial ended, to the Tournelles with her husband; the Seneschal, careless about his dress as usual, except on occasions of state, making an odd, grim little figure—like some not very prosperous merchant, in his squarecloth cap set over the rolled hair, his sober cloth habit. To all outward seeming the two were on good terms, and Diane a pattern wife. She visited France secretly one afternoon, and was as sweet and gracious as in the old days, as though nothing had come between them; not a word was said of what had passed at their last meeting. Her father, whom she loved and who had been France's very good friend, was in great distress of mind over all that passed; for old times' sake, would not France do his best to help him—and their friend, Monseigneur de Bourbon? Indeed, though it was a rôle he hated, he played once or twice, without much success, the old familiar part of admonisher at the royal board; rallying Francis and even Madame Louise on their rashness; quoting against his master the ancient proverb: "*Le roy ne lache que quand le peuple arrache*"—"till folk pull hard, Kings will not leave go." . . . What if the people had a very tall and heavy man to pull with them, and were to pull the King over?

"Good Fool, the King has a knife to cut ropes with," said Francis quickly.

"Good Gossip, so he may, since he may have no victuals to cut with it soon, as things go. But there is another wise saying: 'God save me from my friends, for I can protect myself against my enemies.' A friend turned enemy is the most dangerous of all." The King laughed and turned away.

Diane had put her hand lightly, as in the old days, on France's arm, and her half-closed eyes were very friendly. He coloured; thinking of the striped justaucorps of red and yellow he wore, with the royal salamander on back and front, the belled cap, the ridiculously long-toed shoes of red morocco, his gilded

leather girdle, the Fool's head on his wand of office. She had forgotten these. "If your father wants my help, I will do what I can for old times' sake—and yours," he promised. She leant forward ever so slightly almost as if to kiss him (perhaps the old promise was remembered) but he drew back, and her face was quite inscrutable. But her breath caught as if in a half-sigh; perhaps for her father's distresses.

France snatched another chance of reminding the King of the folly of alienating old and powerful friends at such a juncture. "But it is well said, I think, good Fool," replied the King lightly, (he was flushed with wine), "that where a King is the offender a wise subject will pocket the injury."

"You are leaving your subjects empty pockets to put injuries in, Gossip," retorted France. "But, là là, I am only your Fool—and yet I have three advantages over your Majesty."

"And they?"

"I am not King, I am not drunk, and have no League of Petticoats to make me do its bidding."

Yet he did Diane's bidding; because, even now, he was still her Knight and good servant and friend. One day a dismal letter came to him by a trusty hand from Bouthyon, on the Rhône; St. Vallier was at his wits' ends to know what to do. Without waiting to write, France went as his own answer.

A fast, rough, uncomfortable journey, in plain clothes; he had some little difficulty in finding his way, for when he searched his wallet for St. Vallier's letter it was missing. In his haste it must have been left in his room at the Tournelles. The straggling hamlet where St. Vallier had hidden himself showed every sign of misery and dejection. A swamp of mud surrounded an old, dilapidated house, not easy to find without directions—and the few peasants he asked were slow-witted and spoke in a dialect hard to understand. It was unlit, though early night had fallen. Dreary echoes and the barking of a dog answered the ringing of the creaking, rusty bell; after long waiting Romain Maubert opened to him, cautiously. Maubert was fuller than ever of complaints, yet unfeignedly glad to

see the visitor. At St. Vallier everything was at sixes and sevens in spite of his efforts—all was rack and ruin, or soon would be. Even the little garden—did Monsieur remember it, and how gay it was?—was now a tangle of weeds and thorns. Everything changed. The tenants and peasantry had not a denier to bless themselves with nowadays; they were sullen, disrespectful, sometimes truculent and violent. One did not know whom to trust; there were spies everywhere, and everyone wore a mask. Mademoiselle Diane, now—how gay she had been there, unwedded—they said her husband often treated her brutally, but she did not complain. Maubert had heard from a friend at Paris that they knew the ugly little Seneschal there as the King's Dwarf; he had something savage in him, like his father, who had murdered his faithless wife. Well, it was not his business. . . . Monseigneur the Count was trying a new Iceland falcon, he thought, and would be back to sup. One must do something. The place, as the saying went, was as dull and dismal as ten black night-caps.

St. Vallier came at last; he was flushed and nervous, and surprised to see his visitor without notice, but received him cordially. Over their wine they talked about the difficulties of the time. France listened and advised; St. Vallier said that he had hesitated to consult his son-in-law. Though they were good friends, De Brézé had had too much of an eye for his own interests in the matter of Diane's settlements. Besides, he was with the Court party, while St. Vallier's sympathies were all with Bourbon. As they studied figures and crabbed agreements on musty parchments, the Count lost, now and then, his train of thought; he started nervously and looked round more than once as if ears were listening or eyes watching. Once a rat fell with a splash and squeak behind the tattered arras, and instantly St. Vallier's hand jumped to dagger. He was no longer the easy, good-natured, if somewhat testy soldier of old days, but a man unstrung and on edge. His guest had an uncomfortable feeling that his unexpected arrival was not altogether so welcome as his host was at pains to make him think.

He slept in a large room, shabbily magnificent, in a lonely angle of the old house; a depressing room, the heavy bed-hangings sombre and full of dust, and on the peeling walls faded frescoes of grim scenes from the Bible and the hagiography; Jael and Sisera, Joab's treacherous slaying of Abner, Jezebel eaten by dogs, St. Sebastian transfixed with arrows. . . . He was very tired after his journey, and a little drowsy with wine; but slept fitfully, waking now and then to the lap and swirl and gurgle of the Rhône and the eerie sound of the wind among ragged trees; in the old house itself were innumerable small, distracting noises. It was still quite dark when footsteps and a voice in the uneven, stone-flagged corridor outside his room roused him to complete wakefulness. He caught only a word or two, in a voice faintly familiar; then another voice whispered, but it was nearer and he could hear quite clearly: "Hist, friend, walls have ears."

The footsteps began to ascend a small spiral stairway leading from the corridor. France waited; he thought, but was not certain, that he heard the sound of a closing door, and the mutter of voices. Old instincts to protect his master and guard his interests revived in him; he got out of bed cautiously, and went to the foot of the stairs, groping a way through darkness, but guided by a thin band of yellow light beneath the door of a room above. Times were dangerous; bands of broken and lawless men roamed the countryside. Cautiously, in naked feet, he felt his way up the worn stone steps, and listened.

"We have been like two fingers on a hand so long," one voice was saying, "and have shared worse dangers. My life is not so dear that I will brook dishonour from any man, King or no King."

He recognized the cold, proud voice of Bourbon. In a hot rush Diane's contemptuous words came back to memory: "an eaves-dropping lackey" . . . But France could not tear himself away.

§2

The Count was making objections, evidently, to some plan; he said plaintively: "I must have time to think;

by St. Denis, Charles, loyalties pull two ways! We were boys together, and comrades many a time; and are still, meseems, in a like boat, for the Francis treats me also very ill. Yet—yet—oh, I have prided myself so these many years on being loyal to my King."

"The risk is less than you fear," said Bourbon with impatience. "The Emperor and the English King will aid us. Picardy will be invaded; Lurcy is in negotiation for that; we have two Norman gentlemen planning matters for us in that quarter—you know them; Argogues and Matignan, De Brézé's close friends, who are privy to all his secrets. I meet Baurain, the Emperor's envoy, very soon; we shall open the eastern gates of the realm to their troops as soon as Francis is safe over the Alps. My own people are with me to a man; if it come to that I could even make a stand at Chantelle; it is well-nigh impregnable."

"And the price they offer?" asked St. Vallier in a low voice, much perturbed and with a note of irresolution and misery altogether foreign to the man France had thought he knew.

"Boyaux du Pape, monseigneur," said their companion, whom St. Vallier had silenced in the corridor, "you talk of risks and prices; we of victory—or death, which is but a bogey to scare babes, not grown men. The Constable may be a King himself; unlikelier things have chanced. Arles would make a pretty little realm for him, and he'll make all of us his Dukes and Counts. But if he fails, I am still his servant to hold his cloak in face of them all on the scaffold, and put out my tongue at King and crowd, though they hang me for it. Spine of St. Basil! are we to take no risks, rather than teach this long-beaked King to dip his bill in his own dish, and not ours? Let him keep to his wars and women, and leave other folk what is theirs. I know one thing; in all his army Francis hasn't another archer like Achille Baudemanche, though I say it, and there are shafts in the quiver for Kings as well as plain men if they don't behave."

Bourbon, laughing but without mirth in the laugh, said: "It was customary among the ancients, Baudemanche, never to sacrifice to heroes until after sunset.

. . . Jehan old friend, join us, meet Baurain with me, and we'll play a tune for Francis to dance to. Refuse—and I go my way without you, whatever the ending. For me it is no half matter, but, as my good archer says, Victory or—Death. Our day with the King is over. 'Tis others who gain his laurels, and are to be paid in your money and mine."

"That is so," said St. Vallier with a groan. . . . There was a minute's silence.

"The Seneschal knows naught of this?" he asked at last.

"Nothing—and must know nothing. He is too well with the Court. The King was his guest lately at private supping; there were pretty, light women there; Francis and he made fritters at a fire, and were thick as thieves. That is how they are, and tongues wag about the Lady-Killer and your daughter even; but there doubtless rumour lies."

St. Vallier's fist clenched; his eyes flashed. "I will join you," he cried abruptly, a new decision in his voice.

"De Brézé," continued the Constable, "must know nothing; his father's ruin sticks in his mind; he is no man to risk fortune twice."

"God and Our Lady and the Saints prosper our enterprise—or we are all undone. Charles, I go with you."

"Then there is but one word left. I came by stealth, with Baudemanche only for my company, and must go as stealthily; eyes watch me now. Those who join us swear on the true Cross to be true, and serve loyally, and betray nothing that passes or is done. . . . That relic is here."

France had seen the tiny splinter which the Constable always wore, in a little reliquary of chased gold and crystal and precious stones. The King's Fool knelt reverently on his broken step, and could hear St. Vallier swearing in a mutter secrecy and allegiance. And then, noiselessly, France crept down the stairway to his room. His brain was in a whirl. Bourbon was his friend; St. Vallier his host and friend. . . .

Yet he was in the King's service—and Diane's. And he loved his country, which, if the plot did not mis-

carry, would be torn with dissension, harried by foreign troops, perhaps—unprepared as it was—at the mercy of the Imperialists and the English. Before he slept, he heard a door below open and close; the sound of hoofs, not very loud on the muddy courtyard and lane, reached his ears, and died softly away. A dog barked, but was quickly silenced.

§3

Sleep would not come again. In the morning he rose early; an old peasant woman was at work in the house, and in the court a shock-headed, ragged lad exercised a horse on a rope halter. Maubert, grumbling as he did so, brought trenchers and flagons from the kitchen. Fine state indeed did his master keep in this hole he had dug himself in—and fine work had a good steward been brought to in old age. At St. Vallier, of course, there were servants in plenty, though of late several had been dismissed, and the King had taken many for the war. A pretty business. If Maubert knew anything he kept his secrets. Possibly the Count himself had let his visitors in—and out.

St. Vallier, when he entered, was civil, and even cordial, but over-acted his part, playing the bluff soldier, the very good friend and patron, almost too obviously. There were more parchments to be gone through, figures and agreements and disbursals about which he wanted to consult someone with more legal knowledge than his own. (Yet he had been shrewd at affairs.) It was a farce in which France found himself an unwelcome player. Evidently the Count had no suspicions; and his confidence made matters all the more difficult. France was on thorns; the part he had to play was far more difficult than that of the man who tried to hood him. He advised, discussed, explained, sympathized and every parchment might have been blank or on its first owner's back for all the use his help was. Work, indeed, for a Fool. . . . The hours dragged. St. Vallier ordered his horse to be saddled, a fine half-Arab which France knew of old as the fleetest in the stables of the old château where, once, Diane's white Breton palfrey, Baude, and the big, placid bay mare,

Didon, had munched their corn. Would France ride with him? A spaniel was whistled up and ran behind the horses; on his wrist the Count had his new Iceland falcon, muttering that he might find a chance to test it again. They entered a woodland ride, where here and there the mud was so deep that they had to break their way through undergrowth to avoid it, and here and there the hoofs sank into a sponge of moss. A heath, swept by rain-charged wind, lay behind. St. Vallier talked all the time, cloaking thought with speech. Yet he asked many questions about the Court; what folk were saying, who had gone to the war and who were out of it, what fresh appointments had been made, whether Paris was as discontented as the provinces. "I am out of it all," he said bitterly, "we old fellows were good enough for old Kings, but times alter." France read fear and belated caution, as well as chagrin and fierce resentment, behind the words. When he answered he wrapped counsel as best he could in parcels of words, speaking of the vast preparations he had seen, the cheering crowds that sped departing troops, the ability of marshals and generals (but he was careful to choose names; at least there was Montmorency) the prestige and energy and charm of the King. He admitted that many were dissatisfied—this was common knowledge—but said that wise men had not forgotten how Louis XI had broken the power of the *noblesse*, and made the monarchy supreme. Devil's advocate he felt compelled to be; but, with his heart in his mouth, had to risk St. Vallier's wit tearing his parcel of words asunder too quickly. France used part of his own argument to King Francis, and the King's reply: "The King will not leave go till people pull too hard for them, but, in the tug of war, the King's knife can cut a rope when he chooses." "And," he continued, "when a King is the offender, the saying goes: 'tis wiser to pocket injuries rather than risk greater."

He thought St. Vallier would have flashed out—or, perhaps, confide in him and beg secrecy and support. But the Count rode without speaking, when he spoke at last, it was of sport. Perhaps the warning, given as if innocently, might sink in later. They came through

more woodlands to the river. The hawk was still idle on the glove, but from the sedge a heron rose, trailing long legs; in an instant the falcon was unhooded and freed. It rose and hovered over its prey—then, with incredible dexterity and swiftness, the heron dropped to earth, turned suddenly, and the pouncing hawk was transfixed on the sharp beak. St. Vallier gave a startled cry and crossed himself. More serious than the loss of the costly Iceland falcon was the omen that seemed to have been given to him; yet he was committed to this enterprise on the cross of which he had involuntarily made the sign.

§4

And so, masked from each other, St. Vallier and France Caillette played out their farce of business, and the King's Fool rode back to Paris. He was glad and yet sorry to be away from country solitudes, in a crowded city where private miseries and secrets seemed dwarfed in company of so many with their own to bear and conceal. He was in a quandary as to what good he had now to follow—gratitude to St. Vallier and Bourbon; loyalty to the King whose bread he ate, and to his country menaced by such perils. On the brink, possibly, of civil war, of the horrors and tragedies of foreign invasion, the great city laughed, chatted, made love, amused itself, traded, grumbled, married, buried its dead, as if there were no serious menace to the security of the world it knew. He only, of those many thousands, saw the sword that threatened it, and felt powerless, in this clash of royalties, to raise a finger to help. If he revealed his knowledge the disaster might only be precipitated; for the present, he resolved to keep silence. The conspiracy he had stumbled upon might, like so many, smoulder a while and end without coming to open flame.

Madame Louise disliked the old Palace of the Tournelles so much that she had persuaded the King to give her, for a town house, the Tuileries-St. Honoré, but it was her intention as soon as Francis had crossed the frontier to rule the country from Blois, with Antoine Duprat, the small country lawyer whose abilities had

made him Chancellor and a Prince of the Church, to help her. France Caillette wished that the reins were in any other hands. The last people to whom he could confide his knowledge were the woman whose spurned passion for a man many years younger than herself, and the Cardinal who was Bourbon's and St. Vallier's bitter enemy, had brought so much harm on the realm. And at all costs he must keep the knowledge of her father's disloyalty from Diane. Again and again he longed for the good, easy, homely, friendly, honest days of King Louis and Queen Anne. Everywhere now were extortion, schemings, jealousies, discontents. As the days passed it seemed to him that, under the surface of things, ears listened everywhere, eyes watched everywhere, tongues wagged everywhere, in secret. One night he passed through a little, lonely courtyard of the Palace to his room. Two figures stood close together in the darkness, whispering; they turned their heads at the sound of his footsteps, and in the light of a flickering lanthorn he recognized them as typical of the new regime. Triboulet was one, and the other Fagou Poncest, a slimy, ferret-faced little fellow who was jackal to the King's jackal, and brought news to Triboulet of likely women to be sold at a price. Though Francis was away, amusing himself at Lyons or elsewhere, there were smaller men than the King at the Palace ready to pay for nasty knowledge. They were evidently parting after one of their nocturnal quests. At a word from France Triboulet moved aside to let his master pass; his goggle eyes gleamed malice. France, when he had passed them, caught words intended evidently for his ears.

"Our Master-Fool looks as if he has been in bad company, Poncest. Or is Rhône air bad for the health?"

France stopped—nearly turned to speak—but checked himself. He had kept his visit an absolute secret. This Triboulet was a dangerous fellow who must be watched. For days he was vaguely uneasy, but nothing happened, and he had still much to occupy him, though the King's absence relieved him of several duties. A calm, ominous perhaps of coming storm—or perhaps again imagination made him uneasy, and there

was nothing really to fear—was broken only by the vaguest rumours. King Francis, it was said, had been to Moulins, and Bourbon, not yet dispossessed, had been there to welcome him with lavish hospitality. . . . But strange things were happening none the less; the Bastard of Savoy had been suddenly recalled when well on his way to Italy; constabulary had been sent down into the Bourbonnais; Chantelle had been occupied by the King's orders, and given up without a struggle, almost impregnable as it was on its rocky heights. Bourbon was ill. . . . He was on pilgrimage, at Notre-Dame de Puys. . . . No, he was at Montbrison, his castle in Haut-Forez, deep in forests of fir and pine. . . .

And then, first terrific thunder-clap of a storm ominous mutterings of which had broken the delusive calm, came news more definite; a conspiracy had been discovered involving some of the greatest names in France and in Europe; there had been treachery within treachery, and the Bishop of Lisieux had got wind of it; two Norman gentlemen, becoming frightened, had revealed the plot to a priest, giving him leave to speak or keep silence as he chose; he had told the Seneschal of Normandy; De Brézé, then at Conflans, not suspecting that the matter touched his own interests, had sent a letter to King Francis, and it had fallen into Madame Louise's hands. The Constable, finding himself betrayed, had feigned illness and (travelling first in a litter) had escaped from men sent to spy on him and bring him to the King at Lyons. Smaller birds had been snared, and it was a good saying that when a claw is caught the whole bird may be taken. St. Vallier was under arrest, so were the Bishop of Le Puy, the Bishop of Autun, Antoine de Chabannes, St. Vallier's brother-in-law, the Chancellor of the Bourbonnais, Papillon, St. Bonnet, Bourbon's steward, and several others who had been friends of the Constable and of St. Vallier. Baudemanche was among them.

Paris, and indeed all France, had something fresher to talk of now than the late plague, the mysterious recent assassinations in the capital, the King's growing unpopularity, Duprat's tax on cloven hoofs entering the

made him Chancellor and a Prince of the Church, to help her. France Caillette wished that the reins were in any other hands. The last people to whom he could confide his knowledge were the woman whose spurned passion for a man many years younger than herself, and the Cardinal who was Bourbon's and St. Vallier's bitter enemy, had brought so much harm on the realm. And at all costs he must keep the knowledge of her father's disloyalty from Diane. Again and again he longed for the good, easy, homely, friendly, honest days of King Louis and Queen Anne. Everywhere now were extortion, schemings, jealousies, discontents. As the days passed it seemed to him that, under the surface of things, ears listened everywhere, eyes watched everywhere, tongues wagged everywhere, in secret. One night he passed through a little, lonely courtyard of the Palace to his room. Two figures stood close together in the darkness, whispering; they turned their heads at the sound of his footsteps, and in the light of a flickering lanthorn he recognized them as typical of the new regime. Triboulet was one, and the other Fagou Poncest, a slimy, ferret-faced little fellow who was jackal to the King's jackal, and brought news to Triboulet of likely women to be sold at a price. Though Francis was away, amusing himself at Lyons or elsewhere, there were smaller men than the King at the Palace ready to pay for nasty knowledge. They were evidently parting after one of their nocturnal quests. At a word from France Triboulet moved aside to let his master pass; his goggle eyes gleamed malice. France, when he had passed them, caught words intended evidently for his ears.

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France stopped—nearly turned to speak—but checked himself. He had kept his visit an absolute secret. This Triboulet was a dangerous fellow who must be watched. For days he was vaguely uneasy, but nothing happened, and he had still much to occupy him, though the King's absence relieved him of several duties. A calm, ominous perhaps of coming storm—or perhaps again imagination made him uneasy, and there

was nothing really to fear—was broken only by the vaguest rumours. King Francis, it was said, had been to Moulins, and Bourbon, not yet dispossessed, had been there to welcome him with lavish hospitality. . . . But strange things were happening none the less; the Bastard of Savoy had been suddenly recalled when well on his way to Italy; constabulary had been sent down into the Bourbonnais; Chantelle had been occupied by the King's orders, and given up without a struggle, almost impregnable as it was on its rocky heights. Bourbon was ill. . . . He was on pilgrimage, at Notre-Dame de Puys. . . . No, he was at Montbrison, his castle in Haut-Forez, deep in forests of fir and pine. . . .

And then, first terrific thunder-clap of a storm ominous mutterings of which had broken the delusive calm, came news more definite; a conspiracy had been discovered involving some of the greatest names in France and in Europe; there had been treachery within treachery, and the Bishop of Lisieux had got wind of it; two Norman gentlemen, becoming frightened, had revealed the plot to a priest, giving him leave to speak or keep silence as he chose; he had told the Seneschal of Normandy; De Brézé, then at Conflans, not suspecting that the matter touched his own interests, had sent a letter to King Francis, and it had fallen into Madame Louise's hands. The Constable, finding himself betrayed, had feigned illness and (travelling first in a litter) had escaped from men sent to spy on him and bring him to the King at Lyons. Smaller birds had been snared, and it was a good saying that when a claw is caught the whole bird may be taken. St. Vallier was under arrest, so were the Bishop of Le Puy, the Bishop of Autun, Antoine de Chabannes, St. Vallier's brother-in-law, the Chancellor of the Bourbonnais, Papillon, St. Bonnet, Bourbon's steward, and several others who had been friends of the Constable and of St. Vallier. Baudemanche was among them.

Paris, and indeed all France, had something fresher to talk of now than the late plague, the mysterious recent assassinations in the capital, the King's growing unpopularity, Duprat's tax on cloven hoofs entering the

city gates, the nocturnal pulling down of new gibbets set up to terrify the unruly. Out of a chaos of rumour certain indubitable facts emerged. St. Vallier had been sent from Lyons to Loches and was in close confinement—the King, with whom he had supped on the very eve of his arrest, was in such fury that at first he was for killing him out of hand. An agreement had been drawn up at Montbrison, Adrian de Croy, Lord of Beaurain, acting as the Emperor's agent; Bourbon and St. Vallier had both signed it, but St. Vallier at the last moment had tried to withdraw. "It is settled," Bourbon was reported to have said, "and now let us play a game of flux and say no more of it." Copies had gone to King Henry of England and to the Emperor, who was to give Bourbon his sister in marriage, and a Kingdom, and divide with the English King rich provinces in France when it had been conquered.

CHAPTER XXVI "HOLA! LA REMISSION DU ROY!"

Ostrwitsch: "Look at his head!"
Scatinitsch: "Look at it closely—in the last few hours it has become quite grey!"

THE WOMAN: JOSEF KOSOR.

§1

THE Constable de Bourbon's rebellion, which was to bring Francis to the humiliation of Pavia and a Spanish prison, and Bourbon to his death under the walls of Rome, broke like a thunder-clap on the world. A hundred stories were current of the flight which began so ignominiously with mock sickness and a litter. He had been seen in many places by many people; in Haut-Forez, in Vienne, and in Vendôme at the Hôtellerie des Trois Rois. Or again he had not been seen, but was certainly there, serving as valet to his faithful servant Pompéran, who played lord in his stead. He had changed clothes and hack with Montagnac Tauzannes, and sent him and others by a different route to the destination they all wished to reach. Once he and his little company had retraced their way, reversing the horses' shoes to deceive their pursuers. He had worn,

said one, a great grey cloak, and a black hat over a scarlet cap for concealment. He had disguised himself as a priest. At an inn he was recognized, but escaped just in time. He rode through Auvergne-Dauphiny-Savoy, but at Chambéry rumour lost sight of him, and two months later he was in Germany, hurrying towards Mantua, the Duchy which his mother's family ruled.

The hue and cry had failed; he was safe, among those to whom he had sold his sword, his country, his honour. Goaded at last beyond endurance, he had turned the tables on his enemies; on Francis, on Louise, who had sworn "by the Creator of Souls" to humble his pride to the dust, and on Duprat. Paris had no pity to give the sleek, fat, green-eyed Chancellor ("The Cat," they called him) whose sharp nose pried into every man's business, and who could see as well in the dark as in broad daylight.

At least there were mice to trap and play with. St. Vallier, caged in the grim fastness of Loches, with the reminders round him of the long and painful durance of others, lost all trace of the hardy, valiant, debonair soldier of old years. Prison tamed and broke him very soon; he, to whom men had come cap in hand, was exposed to incessant insult and humiliation. He was spied upon everywhere, every letter he wrote was opened and read, and uncertainty kept him in daily and nightly terror. Every footstep on the stone stairs leading down to his cell quickened his heart to panic beating. Once he had mingled with the Court circle in the *Logis du Roy* as King Louis's very good friend, and realized now how close had been such misery as he was himself, in his turn, to suffer. Torture, semi-starvation, darkness, cold, vermin, iron cages, secret assassination, the wheel, the scaffold—these things had been for others, near yet remote; and now the courage which had made his name famous in the field failed him. In courage of different quality he was lacking.

He wrote piteous letters, in which censorship prevented too much being said; to the Bishop of Lisieux, to De Brézé, to Duprat, to the Regent, to the King. He pleaded his past services, his previous known loyalty; most of his letters remained unanswered, and many, after

hours of careful writing, he tore up lest he should involve himself even more deeply.

It was late in September when he was arrested. There was threat of torture, but broken health saved him; death might come and be spoil-sport; his tormentors did not want to kill secrets, or let their mouse die before their play with it was ended. Autumn passed into winter, adding to the horrors of his dungeon.

And then came a terrible day when, in ignorance of his fate, and dreading that at last the worst had come, he was ordered to prepare himself for the journey to Paris. It was the eve of Christmas, and bitterly cold; the roads were deep in slush left after recent snow. Two other prisoners travelled with him, the Bishop of Le Puy in Auvergne, who was connected with his wife's family, and Papillon, Chancellor of the Bourbonnais. His guards were brutal and insulting, and amused themselves by taunting him with the probable fate awaiting him. They pointed to each gibbet on the way, until his body shook with icy apprehension. Memories of happiness and freedom awoke as they passed place after place once familiar. Here he had shot a great stag with a cross-bow Bourbon had given him; in this château he and Jeanne de Baftarnay and little Diane had once spent a night; in this church, in boyhood, he had knelt at a long-ago Epiphany before the crib. . . . But now the little Saviour would not save; the Mother of God was deaf to prayers. In miserable hamlets peasants, the most wretched of whom he had cause to envy, jeered and flung caked snow; when the patron of an inn where they halted gave him a smile and a cheering word, he broke down. His guards paid the score with a silver coin bearing the three lilies in a shield, and the crown he had once served so loyally. . . . But he was penniless, who had been so rich and great.

They took him and his companions to the Conciergerie, where again torture was threatened, the instruments being brought to his bed; again, after pleading innocence, he shrieked that he would confess all—would write imploring Bourbon to return to his allegiance, give anything, to be set free. He wrote De Brézé letter after letter, reminding him of their old friendship, their close

relationship, their comradeship in so many campaigns; reminding him—for appeals to selfish interests and cupidity might succeed—that if he lost fortune and life, De Brézé and Diane must suffer also. Many times he wrote to Diane, who sent him, from Anet, clothes and small comforts, and promised to do what she could. She had been refused permission to see him, and her appeals for mercy had been ignored. Her husband was furious; he had been gulled by his father-in-law and made ridiculous; he did not want to be drawn further into the affairs of traitors to his country and his good King.

§2

Diane was now at Anet, living quietly, looking after her two little girls and her household, and spending much time in prayer for her father whom she loved as unselfishly as she could love anyone in the world. She wrote frequently to De Brézé—now at Conflans, now at Rouen, now in Paris—he had been in Italy for a while, where things were going very ill, but had been back some months. De Brézé had promised to do what he could, but had no intention of running his own neck into danger. The fact that part of the plot in which his father-in-law was involved had been engineered in Normandy, and by men pretending to be his friends, had incensed the Seneschal beyond measure. There had even been rumours (no one had dared to say such things to his face) that he himself had had a hand in this attempt to open Normandy to the English!

One day came a letter from Anet to France Caillette in a writing he knew too well for happiness. Had he not outgrown the time—he asked himself bitterly—when the sight of it could pluck heart-strings? The bold, clear hand showed haste and an unwonted agitation. Could no one save her poor father? Diane asked. Could France do nothing to move the heart of the King, with whom he had been so much in contact since his appointment as *Fou-en-titre?* She had moved heaven and earth without avail. Even prayer seemed mere prattle now, though it was wrong to say so. She had implored Madame Louise to have mercy, but she was implacable;

no friend of Bourbon or traitor to her Cæsar deserved pity. Poor Queen Claude, in whose service Diane was, had hardly any influence. With twelve thousand lansquenets in Champagne—twenty-five thousand Spanish troops threatening the South—and thirty-five thousand English and Dutch invading Picardy, the King was in no mood for mercy. They meant to have her father's life. There was, it seemed, some parody of a trial talked of or in progress, but he was not even to be given a hearing. Her husband was at Blois; she had persuaded him, after infinite trouble, to write to Montmorency and to René, Bastard of Savoy, the brother of the Regent and now Grand-Master of France, but there seemed little hope from those quarters. St. Vallier was very ill; he did nothing but weep and write letters, day and night; they had again threatened him with torture. Her brother Guillaume was incensed because their father's arrest had interrupted negotiations for his advantageous marriage with Françoise des Moulins. Should she come to Paris? But it seemed little use. Yet her poor father's letters were so piteous; it stabbed her heart to see the shaky signature, which had been so bold, "*Votre bon père, Poitiers.*" After one signature he had scrawled, "*J'ai le cœur si serré qu'il me crève—ayez pitié de moy.*" Oh, it was indeed pitiable. If ever she needed a true friend to counsel her, a good Knight, such as France had sworn ever to be, to help her, it was now.

A disjointed, rambling, over-wrought letter—it touched him strangely. Here was a Diane he had never known; not heartless, not utterly selfish, as he had sometimes thought her even against his will. The realization of her need, that brought her to him, swept away resentment.

He went to Anet.

The park, the turrets and towers of the ancient castle which had sheltered so many olden Kings, the great dove-cote for which it was famous, were under snow. A servant dressed in forester's green, and with a great boarhound by his side, took him to Madame La Sénéchalle's housekeeper, Mademoiselle de la Terre Noire, a discreet, middle-aged woman with a prim mouth and face like ivory. Madame had just returned from riding, and was

in her bath, but would receive him in a few minutes. He was shown into a boudoir which showed that Diane's little hands had been busy in making her own nest beautiful within the scarred, grey walls of the castle. Cherry coloured cushions, white curtains sprigged with flowers in delicate hues, an Italian picture of the Holy Family and panels painted with vernal scenes and trophies and implements of the chase, furniture, an ivory and silver riding-whip, brushes, toilet boxes, were in perfect taste and keeping. A log fire was burning, yet it was a summer rather than winter room in which he found himself. Something of the cold restraint, almost austerity, of Diane's usual nature seemed embodied in the environment she had chosen.

The screen stood before a second door leading to another department; France heard the splash and silvery tinkle of falling water. And then a voice—Diane's voice—"Is that you? But you are early. . . . I will not be a minute now."

He longed to see her, longed to help and comfort her; in this interview at least he must have her alone as in the sweet, old days, though now impassable barriers were between them. Had he been wise to come, he wondered? A hundred times he had assured himself that his passion was dead—in this sudden, unexpected intimacy (the screen and door only separating them) he knew that he loved her not less but more; loved her whatever she was, heartless or no, cold to him or no. He was about to answer—his voice slurring strangely over the first word—when the door by which he had entered opened.

He turned sharply. A gentleman stood there, in a felt hat panached with a curled yellow plume; he was unfastening his cloak; under it he wore a riding-dress of grey broidered with silver, and snow was on the spurred Cordovan boots.

The face he knew well enough, as all in the Kingdom and in Europe knew it. The fair, smallish, well-trimmed beard; the long brown eyes, the skin of brownish tint, that nose which players had been punished for ridiculing in the late farces—— There was no mistaking the King, his master.

And, at that moment, the door of the inner room also

opened, with a rustle of drawn hangings; from behind the screen came Diane.

She was fresh as spring, glowing after her ride and the ice-cold water of the bath, but her face was sad and humbled. Young and beautiful she was, as she had vowed once, half in jest yet half also with an odd, wistful earnestness as if praying time to spare her, to stay until life's end. (But Dante in his brain-sickness had thought suddenly: "It must needs be that the most gentle Beatrice will some time die!") Her loose, silver-grey robe, revealing while hiding the exquisite delicacy of her form, had been flung on in haste; yet not the most elaborate preparation could have suited her more admirably. Her dark hair was loose, and she flung it back impulsively; dew-drops glittered among the blue-black waves. How lovely she was!

The inscrutable eyes widened, were startled. "Sire!" she cried, and then: "France—you too are here?"

France's cheeks burned; a flame leapt of fierce yellow jealousy. The King! A score of rumours he had heard and ignored took on possibility. . . . Yet what was it to the King's Fool, or she to him—now? Let De Brézé see to it. Because of old friendship and love, the boy she had loved and helped was there to help her if help were needed. And if not, he would go as he came.

"France," she said in a low, frightened voice, as she came to greet the King, "wait below; I will speak to you later." She struck a little gong, slung like a globe on the back of a tiny Atlas; Mademoiselle de la Terre Noire entered. But the King said: "No, let him stay. . . . Good Fool, why are you not in Paris? I have no under-Fools or monsters here for guarding."

"Good Francis," retorted France, but lamely, "all women are fools and must be guarded. But, là là, 'tis no business of a poor Master-Fool to guard women, when a King is here who knows women's business so well. I will go, Gossip Francis, and so leave you your female Fool."

"No; stay, Fool; but you are not in motley; spare your wit!" The King spoke with some impatience. "On what errand are you so far from Paris?"

"To see where our poor Paris has gone to, by my

marotte! For I knew a Paris once, Sire, where a King loved justice, and was loyal to wife and friends, and ruled wisely, and knew that you could not drink all your wine and have it too; King Loys was his name. But at the Tournelles, where our Fools are, Master-Fool Death took him, and then that Paris ran away. I came to find it."

"Faith of a Gentleman! You look for it in a very pretty lady's room. Since you are here, solve me a riddle." He turned to Diane. "Madame, I came to break ill news myself; your father is condemned, and must die. I cannot alter what the judges have resolved. A courier has just brought word to me." He was agitated, as France Caillette had never seen him, and kept his flickering eyes from her, but, while he spoke, on his Fool. Diane turned ivory-pale and a little hand went to her white breast; she nearly fell, but controlled herself.

"*Par la tête Dieu,* I wish he had kept out of this matter, Madame La Sénéchalle. Montmorency has begged his life; René of Savoy, your husband who is my very good friend and servant. . . . But the offence is too grave for pardon; I came myself to answer your note. Duprat will not have it, Madame my good mother will not have it." . . .

"And yet you are King!" cried Diane, drawing herself up, her eyes wide and aflame with indignation and contempt. "Oh, then it is true what they say; women and frocked men rule you rather than the heart and wits given you by God." Her sudden anger spent itself; she sank to her knees before the weak, fickle, handsome man: "Oh, but spare him, Sire; prove yourself King and spare him; let him go."

"There must be example," he said nervously, and paced the room, fingering his carefully trimmed, sandy beard. "Faith of my body, Diane," he broke out, "I tried to save him, but saw no way. 'Tis a treason so foul. . . . The minute the news came I rode hither. What can I do?"

"The Constable juggled him into his oath, I know," gasped Diane, "if indeed he took it. Since I was a little child my father has prided himself on nothing as on loyalty to his King, and taught us that. . . . Oh, he is a soldier, and brave. . . . Indeed, indeed, he is

innocent, and a scape-goat. . . . I would strip myself of all—of *all*—to save him." In her agitation, hitherto held with such difficulty in control, she tore at the wrapper as if in utter abandon of herself—but checked herself; only the lovely bosom, heaving with distress, was for an instant bare of covering. "Oh, if you are King, Francis, *be* King."

Francis turned sharply to his jester. "You have wits," he said. "I would save Monseigneur de St. Vallier if I could, but one is torn this way and that; there is your riddle to answer. For the nonce be your King and mine; show me a way. . . . And yet 'tis even now too late. He is to die at three on Wednesday. And Paris—how far? Kings cannot rule time or space. It is too late."

"No, no!" cried Diane.

"And if it were not," went on the King, "am I to let one traitor go, and have all see how safe it is to play treason? A game as easy as glic or tric-trac? Gentleman's Faith! He is not innocent; we know too much. . . . For old times' sake and yours, his daughter's, and my friend's, I would spare if I could; no, I may not. If I save one so must I all. Not my Master-Fool even can solve me this riddle, how to bring opposites together; to make example of treason, yet let the offender go."

"France, France, can you say nothing to move him?" Diane asked. Their eyes met. "Oh, I know I have treated you ill; forgive me now. My poor father was your good friend."

For half a minute there was silence. "There was One great enough to save all," he said, gravely, at last to the King.

"But, Faith of my body," cried Francis and grimaced, "I am not God. If Bourbon is brought to heel, am I to spare him too? My realm is not safe."

"Nenny, no, you are not God. . . . God does not lead men to temptation. . . . Had I my bauble and my coxcomb here you should have them; indeed he should be Master-Fool of Master-Fools who, having a rich realm, must pour its blood and wealth abroad, and having a kind wife, seek other men's, and having loyal subjects goad them by injustice to rebellion. Yet none

the less yours is a riddle I can undo—if there still be time."

"Leave folly, and tell the answer."

"Have your example made—if you must. Show yourself steel-stern against treason. Yet show also that you are great enough, even at the eleventh hour, to forgive. Could not God do that? The sin he hates; the sinner loves and pardons. And it will serve you well to be like Him in that, for He that was King of Kings knew how to rule men."

"You see a way to save him, yet show no weakness? We must not seem fearful to strike, and punishment there must be. Show me the way. . . . There, there, Diane, do not cry; it seems my Fool can get us out. And, Diane, if I save your father what pretty reward is there?" He said it lightly, and his long, brown eyes, beautiful but fickle and untrustworthy, watched her closely and (France felt) significantly; the King laughed. His Master-Fool's anger rose as he saw, or suspected, an answering look in Diane's semi-veiled eyes. Yet her glance left the King's face, and for himself also was just such another look. She said, smiling with relief and happiness so that all her face was transfigured: "Oh, Sire, but save him to live long and die restfully in his bed, and what could I not give to one whose gift is my kind, good father?" She hated illness, ugliness, death, the horrible, and must have dreamt often troubled dreams in which the terrors of torture, the scaffold, dismemberment, passed like galanty scenes of horror.

France, knowing Diane so well, knew this; there was a scrap of old romance he remembered sometimes, and had quoted to her, laughing, when they told their dreams:

> "'*Très volontiers,*' *repartit le démon,*
> '*Vous aimez les tableaux changeans;*
> *Je veux vous contenter.*'"

The changing pictures of her fate were to have been all pleasing, all beautiful, and she unchanging among them, never growing weary, or sad, or old like others. But

there was the horoscope, taken at her birth, over which in the little garden they had laughed also.

" Celle
Quy de Jehan de Poytiers naistra,
Et quy Diane se nommera
Teste de neige saulvera
Puis teste d'or perdra.
Mais en saulvant comme en perdant
Pleurs versera icelle enfant
Cependant resjouissez-vous
Pour ce quy gouvenera tous
Icelle."

" Will save the snowy head ! " What did all mean ? A guess, and meaningless—to mystify but be laughed over. She had rallied him once, when they were boy and girl at St. Vallier, saying : " I shall not save *you,* France, anyhow ; a fool's head, the proverb goes, never becomes white." They did not dream then that one day he would be King's Fool, but he bit his lip and flushed, remembering his father in the *Salle des Fous* at Loches. She saw her blunder, and said quickly : " Nor myself, France, for you know I shall never grow old."

§3

Three in the afternoon of February 17th, 1524, was the time appointed for Jehan de Poitiers, Comte de St. Vallier, to die. At two o'clock a horseman, his steed covered with sweat and foam, halted for a few moments at the Porte de Vanves, exchanged a dozen shouted words with the guard, showed papers sealed with green wax and bound with crimson and gold silk cords, at sight of which caps were doffed and carts in the gateway ordered harshly to clear the way for the King's messenger—France Caillette rode into Paris.

From Anet it is only fifty miles, but winter, exceptionally hard that year, set its pickets of ice and snow, slush and mist and late and early darkness, to make the journey trebly difficult and long. He had started an hour before sunset to break part of it, and, as it was im-

possible to find his way in pitch darkness, had slept for a few troubled hours—or tried to sleep—at an inn on his road. The " tableaux changeans " of the last few hours filled waking thoughts and dream. While Diane was finishing her toilette, the King and he had discussed in the outer room the solution which France proposed. Using all his wits, the Master-Fool had coaxed, wheedled, humoured, bantered, in the end almost frightened his easy and easily-influenced master into compliance with his plan to save both St. Vallier's life and—the countenance of his Majesty. The King's growing unpopularity was making it dangerous for him to appear in Paris—and Francis loved to be loved, loved to be thought debonair, gracious, magnanimous. France had to content himself with the bare life of the man for whose pardon he pleaded; the King would not let him go altogether scathless; a terrible example must still be given, yet (well, it seemed this might be managed) an example tempered with a show of pity and mercy, which would disarm his Majesty's enemies of their strongest weapon against him, and bind De Brézé, Diane, Montmorency, and those nobles and commons who wavered between old loyalties and new resentments in closer allegiance to the throne.

With Diane's own plumed pen, white and pale blue, dipped in an ink-horn of Venetian glass set in a frame of tortoise-shell, France had drafted two letters; the King, reading with knitted brows, had scored through certain words and added others; fair copies were made, and sealed and dated from " Blois, February, 1524 "—but without the day of the month being named. " *Grâce du Roy, François par la grâce de Dieu, à tous présents et à venir, Salut,*" each began.

One was to the Governor of the Conciergerie in Paris —the dread prison where, in one of the notorious " kitchens of St. Louis " as its worst dungeons were nicknamed, St. Vallier lay in misery and sickness and apprehension; one to the Chancellor, Antoine Duprat, who had been King's Proxy at the travesty of his trial.

And then Diane had given France the stirrup-cup with her own hand, thanked him again and again—he might, had he chosen, have claimed the old, promised guerdon

of a kiss. He did not. The King was to ride a little later to Dreux—so Diane said. In her few parting words she said that his Majesty's visit was really a surprise; her letters had hitherto been unanswered; he had been at Lyons, but Bourbon's rising had changed his plans.

A score of floating tales and rumours kept France from peaceful sleep. But then love, which had seemed to sleep, was awake also, with jealousy for its bed-fellow. It would have been unsafe for him to stay.

§4

The first glow of wintry dawn on hills and frosted trees saw him again on his road. In fair weather, with a good horse under him, there should have been ample time. But in a narrow road a line of bulging wagons held him up; at one place a broken bridge forced him to make a wide detour; snow drifts and fallen trees made forest paths difficult; lanes were deep in mud and slush. Close to Paris streams of market-folk hindered him. The horse tired and flagged.

He spoke to it, patted it, at last whipped and spurred it mercilessly, the life of his old master—Diane's father—being at the jeopardy of each lost minute. At the Chancellor's (not far from the Pont St. Michel) an officious underling argued about admittance; but he was face to face at last with the sleek Churchman whose green, feline eyes pried into so many hearts and secrets, whose plump clutching fingers picked so many pockets, of rich and poor. And then—was he still in time?—to the Conciergerie.

The procession to La Grève had not started. While he waited to see the Governor, France caught scraps of news. St. Vallier had just seen his Confessor. . . . He had been offered a meal, but had been unable to eat, though he had gulped down a mug of wine. . . . The Comte de Boissy had torn away from him the now pitiful insignia of rank which he had retained even in his miseries; degrading him from his position as Captain of the Hundred Gentlemen-at-arms; stripping from him the linked golden shells of his Collar of St. Michael. . . . Malon, Vignolles, accompanied by eight ushers of the Court, had entered his cell and the condemnation had

been read. . . . So much France gathered. Already it was past the hour at which the grim last progress should have commenced.

In the courtyard the procession was forming. France had handed his letter to the Governor; he waited to see the condemned, the central figure of this dread pageantry of death, come out. His old master and good friend—but, oh, how changed! All St. Vallier's courage had gone; he shook like a leaf, his limbs were wasted and shrunken, his face pallid and drawn with agony, the beard, very notable against high cheek-bones and the waxen skin, was still dark—but his hair, uncovered by any head-gear, had turned snow-white!

"*Teste de neige saulvera.* . . ."

St. Vallier's hands were tied behind his back. He wore a robe of coarse woollen lined with fox-skin. Waiting to escort him to the scaffold were sergeants with long clubs, archers and arbalastriers, hacquebutiers; his Confessor, Maître Jacques Merlin, the thin, hatchet-faced ascetic with whom Diane and France had learned their lessons at St. Vallier, put a long leg over the saddle of a mule and took his seat on squeaking leather. A saddled horse stood near. On to the back of this the condemned man was roughly hoisted and thrust; he slipped sideways in a heap; an archer clambered up behind him at a signal, and held him in his place.

And, not so very long ago, he had led his Gentlemen and Men-at-arms so gallantly in pageants and in the field!

France, mounting his horse, followed the dismal cortège. The executioner, a colossal figure in tight, blood-red garments, took the horse's rein. Slowly, with a deliberate and tantalizing slowness, they moved through streets crowded with spectators. Sergeants and archers had to force a way. The Place de Grève was thronged—all Paris seemed there; in every window and on every roof were onlookers. It was bitterly cold, and the vast concourse had long grown impatient. A sea of excited faces turned to greet the coming of the victim. In the Place the Sergeants of the Châtelet and men-at-arms, some in heavy armour, kept a clear passage to the scaffold. France backed and edged his horse to a corner

from which he could see over the heads of the crowd. A man near him was telling his neighbour that already two criminals had been decapitated that day. Juniper had just been flung down to sweeten the scaffold so that it should not offend the nostrils of high officials and their ladies assembled round it.

St. Vallier was dragged from the back of the horse and made to mount the steps; he was so weak and panic-stricken that he had almost to be carried. His woollen outer robe was torn off; in his pourpoint and hose, bare-headed in the freezing air, he stood shaking, a pitiful figure indeed, with his haggard, frightened face, the once-bold eyes showing craven fear, the once dark bullet head snow-white. They forced him to his knees, where he had to beg pardon of God, of justice, and of his country. Two executioners, Mace who had led his horse, and Rotillon, were on the scaffold, and Merlin the Confessor tried to fortify his old friend for this last bitter journey.

There was again delay; though the time appointed for him to die had already passed, minute followed minute—a quarter of an hour lengthened to another quarter—and still he lived. It was inexplicable, and even France wondered, though he was in a secret unshared by all present save the Governor of the Conciergerie and the King's Lieutenant-Criminal. The riff-raff of Paris were there, and grew restive; interspersing cries for vengeance to be done quickly, doggerel gallow-songs were droned in a monotonous chant, accompanied by laughter, jeers, and stamping of feet. "*Juge vif et juge mort, monte, monte l'echelette!*" was taken up by a thousand voices. But there were many who murmured at the severity of his punishment, and it was evident that not a few preferred Bourbon to their King. Paris had no love for Madame Louise or Duprat, and, though it liked a free spectacle and was not averse to horrors, had time in the long delay to remember its antipathies, and to remember also that the Count who had fallen so low had once fought for his King and country with a gallantry that deserved a nobler and less humiliating end.

Ah—the chief executioner was on his knees at last, begging the man he was about to kill for forgiveness.

And now St. Vallier was making some request—perhaps that the agony of waiting might be shortened. And now he was praying. When he staggered to his feet again a soldier, moved by his misery, lifted a saddle for him to rest on. He sat huddled there, and waited. Still there was no signal.

Threequarters of an hour—an hour—they still dallied. Then was a shouting, the clatter of hoofs, and every head turned towards an Archer—one of the Cardinal's household, sent by Duprat from the Hôtel Hercules—who rode as if in urgency, and waved a green sealed missive in the air.

"*Holà! Holà! Surcease! Assez, assez! la Rémission du Roy!*"

§5

At last the reprieve had come. An example had been made; the King's clemency shown before the face of the world, just as his anger had been shown, and the power which might so easily have exacted the uttermost penalty. St. Vallier stood for a full minute like one come dazed from the very dead; livid, blank of face, shuddering, as if he stood on the icy brink of ages of oblivion, from which an unknown but merciful hand had miraculously snatched him. Suddenly he gave a great spasmodic leap, and laughed, a terrible, eerie laugh, chilling the blood. The vast crowd stood spellbound. Again and again he laughed in an hysteria of joy; and then fell suddenly a-crying; and then to crossing himself, again and again and again, on brow, and heart, and shoulders—and bent to kiss the scaffold—and was turning from one to another, talking eagerly, but in unfinished sentences; and was shaking the hands of officials, his Confessor, the executioners; was even hugging some of those nearest to him. But his ecstasy was brusquely interrupted. The woollen robe was flung on him, he was hustled down the steps and hoisted roughly into the saddle. Life had been granted, but more than this mere pittance of life the King had refused to give. He was to return to the Conciergerie, and then to Loches, to be shut perpetually within stone walls, with just sufficient food and drink to keep body and soul together until death should bring full re-

mission. This was all the boon France had been able to obtain.*

To lesser folk Francis had been more merciful, and some of those who had been brought to Paris were to be set free.

Weary and nauseated, France urged his horse through the crush and scramble that followed St. Vallier's removal from the scaffold. He had to draw rein for a moment to let his late master and his escort pass. St. Vallier, gripped like a bundle by the Archer who was astride the horse, laughed, grimaced, peered this way and that in blinking delight in the winter sunshine after months of darkness. He chatted hysterically to his companion. France caught a few words. His cheeks flamed; the hand clutching the rein clenched tightly, so that his nails cut into the palm.

"*God save the pretty face of my daughter, for had she been a lad she could not have bought my life from the King.*"

Angry, disgusted, disillusioned, France drove spur deep in the flank of his jaded horse, shouting for the mob to make way. Some of the riff-raff turned on him furiously, and a dirty hand clutched at the bridle. He recognized the face of Poncest, the loathsome creature who was Triboulet's accomplice in ministering to the King's secret pleasures. The horse reared—and a second man slipped and fell, the hoofs just grazing him.

Triboulet's goggle eyes, frightened and malicious, looked up at him from the kennel. A distorted mouth spluttered oaths and curses. France clutched at the fellow's soiled doublet, and dragged him aside, out of harm's way, but by ill-chance into one of the many muck-heaps in the kennel.

As his master rode on, leaving him to extricate himself, Triboulet cried, in a voice loud enough to reach his ear: "*Mort Diable!* Let someone have a heed to himself now. . . . Little Fools may have little falls, but Great Fools great. . . . Poncest, lend a hand to brush

* Two years later, the Treaty of Madrid gave St. Vallier his freedom. He lived in retirement on his estates in Dauphiny with a third wife, meddling no more in politics. . . . The actual words about Diane reported by Brantôme as having been spoken by St. Vallier in his delight at his reprieve are too coarse for modern ears.

this muck off. . . . Our good Master-Fool forgets that great and pretty ladies will not sell themselves to save anyone . . . and, by St. John Baptist, 'tis not always necessary to die without a head!" He spat viciously on the cobbles, while Poncest groomed him and consoled him.

CHAPTER XXVII THE EVE OF THE FEAST OF KINGS

Timon: "*Would poison were obedient and knew my mind!*"
Apemantus: "*Where would'st thou send it?*"
Timon: "*To sauce thy dishes.*"
TAMING OF THE SHREW, ACT IV, SC. III.

§1

FRANCE CAILLETTE went back to his duties at the Tournelles in less heart than his former master to his imprisonment in the Conciergerie and at Loches. Was not he also condemned for life—to be ridiculous, to make sport for others, to be merry when sad at heart, to jest and riddle and pun and make verses; a paid Fool, a fed and kept Buffoon, a perpetual laughing-stock? He had been warned more than once not to meddle with the King's goose. But, if Diane was that (it was disloyal to harbour even the least suspicion) was he not himself the King's gander, cackling stupidities he hated, doing his foolish goose-steppings, yet nevertheless a man like those in the old stories whom evil spells bewitched out of manhood?

In an ancient Latin book at Moulins he had read of one who played with magic, hoping that he might be changed into a winged Cupid for a maid to love and be loved by—but, muddling the charms, was turned into an ass. Only by eating roses could he be transformed again. . . . The heart stayed, but youth would soon be going, and roses fade, and the year grow old.

One day, not long after St. Vallier's mock execution, a great joy, yet incomplete, as most joys are, came to him through a man he had been able to help. Baudemanche, with other lesser folk who had been in the conspiracy, had been released on condition that he did not leave

Paris, and held himself ready to come up for judgment if called upon to do so. Bourbon's famous archer met France when night was falling, in the Rue Pied-de-Bœuf, and had news. It would be better told over a bottle, and they went together to the *Hôtellerie de Prestre-Jehan,* at the junction of the Rue de Bresse and the Rue du Borel, where they found a quiet corner before a great empty wine-barrel painted with a reproduction of the famous sign hanging before the inn. "Monseigneur le Prestre-Jehan, Roy d'Esthiopie," was depicted as a negro monarch, with a venerable white beard, and garments partly sacerdotal and partly regal. The hostelry to which he gave his name was one of the most popular in Paris. Already candles and brass lamps, triple-beaked, were being lit; a number of guests were supping at tables covered with fine Flanders cloth, while others, like Baudemanche and Caillette, drank their wine or ate their victuals in a fashion more primitive. The great arcaded room, garishly painted, was noisy and over-heated. Almost every station of Parisian life seemed represented; here was a party of theological students, in bright scarlet, from the College of Notre-Dame; there a group of archers; there again a merchant with his wife and family; in an alcove, students from La Marche and the Four Nations; not far from them, some doctors from the Rue de la Bucherie. Hawkers, vendors of almanacs and cheap books, mendicant friars, beggars, wandered from table to table, from barrel to barrel.

Baudemanche was nervous and awkward; Boyaux du Pape, he had had his taste of dungeon, and did not like it, and even now they kept him tied to a stake like an old woman's cow, only able to run round and round. But it was something to have even so much freedom. To throw a man to the mercy of royal gaolers, who might taunt, order, lash, kick, humiliate as they pleased, was as barbarous as sending Christians to the lions. For all that his lions had found him a tough Christian. By St. Basil's Spine, what a fate, to be penned and tied when his great master had raised his standard!

It was evident that in the dark misery of his cell the archer had often pictured that mad, devious journey to safety—and to revenge; the risks, the lurkings, the star-

lit bivouacs, the final joyous welcome at a camp of friends and allies, the shouts, the plumes, the glint of morions and breasts and weapons, the banners. Like an old war-horse, Baudemanche scented battles from afar, and sighed that he was out of it all.

His news was of Alec Maclean. A warder at the Conciergerie, an old soldier like himself, had been present when the little detachment of the Scottish Guard —only a score or so of men, he said, and a few French Guards among them—had been treacherously attacked in the Milanais. They had been ambushed at a little village in the South, not very far from the Apennines, and the Tuscan frontier. Italy was infested during these troubles by bands of brigands or guerillas like "The Thousand Devils" of Montholon who had spread terror in France just before Bourbon's rising. Montholon, whom they dubbed "Le Roy Gaillot"—he had his own petty Court and levied taxes—was a gentleman in sympathy with the Constable, but rose too soon; some of the Constable's own troops had delivered him to justice, in the hope of influencing the Magistrates in their master's favour. The King had ordered him to be quartered alive, but the sentence was reduced to decapitation. . . . Some such band had trapped Alec Maclean and his men, killing some, wounding others, and carrying off those they could into their mountain fastnesses in order to hold them to ransom. The name of the village was Santa Chiara. Alec, severely wounded while trying to save a comrade, had been taken prisoner, but the warder, who had succeeded in escaping, had heard afterwards that he was to be exchanged.

It was unlikely that he would ever be fit for more service.

France was over-joyed at the news. Rumour, passing through so many lips, and finding him at last through the uncertain medium of poor Papa Caillette, had killed and buried this staunch and loyal friend who, happily, still lived; as soon as he and Baudemanche had parted company, France went to the Commandant of the Guards in Paris, and, telling him when he had heard, sent a letter and money to Murdoch, an old acquaintance and one of Alec's closest friends, urging him to do all

in his power to expedite the captive's exchange and return. To Jennifer Ennis he went also; after Queen Claude's death she had entered the service of Madame Louise, and was now at the Tuileries-St. Honoré, though she bore small love for her new mistress. He found the girl, once so pert and proud and difficult, strangely humble and broken, blurting out things that, without this news, she would have died rather than told. She reproached herself a hundred times for having sent Alec to the wars with a "No" which had meant "Yes." But then she had not thought, proud though he was and contemptuous of women, that he would take "No" so easily for a final answer. When he had said, in his gruff way, making it seem almost an insult, that he wanted her, he had said in almost the same breath that he had small patience with women, and preached about what women should be and do until her own pride had stepped between them. She had not *meant* "No." . . . By every courier she expected some letter, and then came the rumour that he was killed. Why, she asked France piteously, was a woman's tongue so often the foe of her own happiness? She loved Alec; night after night she lay sleepless, wretched, praying to skies from which no answer came. Every écu she had, every bead and trinket, she would give to have him back, hale or ill, whole or broken, so long as he still lived; and was already devising candles and gifts for helpful shrines, and wishing she were a man to go and bring him home, when France left her. . . . He wrote also to Alec's old mother in Scotland.

§2

The King, faced with danger on every hand, had stayed only a few days in Normandy, which was threatened by the English; but his unexpected visit to Anet caused France a hundred head and heart aches. It made him suspicious of many trifling episodes and rumours to which he had formerly attached little or no importance. Memories of the crude verses he had so often turned and polished for his master took on a new significance. Most of these were amorous, and not all to Madame de Châteaubriant, of whom, indeed, his

Majesty began to tire. A little black-eyed maid to Madame Louise had caught his fancy; there were others. A score of years or so later, when Francis lay dying at Rambouillet, the Comte d'Aumale paced restlessly from death-chamber to ante-room—where Diane fidgetted and Catherine de'Medici sat on her tabouret with her head hidden in her hands while they waited for the end—paced restlessly, muttering in his beard: "The Lady-Killer is going! The Lady-Killer is going!"

But in Paris, lately, they had been saying bitter things about "King Big-Nose" and "Monseigneur Foy-de-Gentilhomme," and the way in which, as good King Louis had feared, he was wrecking everything.

Among these verses which France had to complete and make shapely were, to his chagrin, some pretty conceits about the huntress-goddess of the Ephesians—the Dorian goddess, serene, cold, cruel, vigorous, frigidly lovely, mistress of healing herbs, slayer of Callisto, lover of Endymion. He had nothing but guess-work to tell him whether these verses to Diane, whose emblem was the moon, whose home the woodland, were for the girl who dwelt and hunted in Dreux Forest; but his encounter with the King at Anet, the King's light question about a reward for serving her, rekindled smouldering jealousies and suspicions. He was sworn, for no reward himself at all, to be Diane's friend always and for ever; whatever she was, whatever she did, nothing could alter that, and his visit to Anet had made him realize that his love grew rather than lessened with the years. That love which had begun in boyhood was the enemy, he knew, of his own content and happiness. If he had loved her less, his own case might not have been so hopeless; it was this great, unreasoning love he had for her, wanting her good only, that protected her even from himself and the passion he had sometimes found it difficult to control.

In the *Salle des Fous* Triboulet was giving trouble. Jealousy as yellow as the yellow of his new pied habit and stockings, rage as red as their scarlet, yearnings for revenge as impotent as his lath sword or the Fool's bladder, consumed a nature in which spite and malice

and uncleanness were compounded as in some witch's cauldron simmering over fire. His hump still gave him twinges now and then to remind him of the Place de Grève. To be ridden down like that, hurt, flung in the muck and left there contemptuously—this from a fellow who had supplanted him, a common mountebank who had been given the place he himself had coveted and worked for and was entitled to! A fine Master-Fool indeed, giving himself airs and graces, claiming, on the strength of a stolen ouche, to be highly born—when everyone knew his sottish old father who had not even sense enough to play at hanging without doing it in earnest. . . . And his grandfather, they said, another common Kitchen-Fool, to a petty country lord, had been swung for his crimes. He to put on airs! Even Paris hat-shops had not hats big enough now for a head so swollen.

Triboulet found plenty to listen to him among the unhappy beings France Caillette ruled, and tried to rule kindly and with justice. He reminded them of every little grievance, magnifying mole-hills into mountains. He circulated tales and scandals, dropped mysterious hints, curried favour for himself by bragging promises as to what he himself would do if he were in France's place. There were sour looks now, unfriendly whisperings, small insubordinations, when France entered the *Salle*. These were ignored at first, but one day Triboulet, who had been drinking with Poncest and one or two of his friends from the outer world, broke into open insolence and rebellion when France gave some order. At a sharp reprimand he gave free course to a venomous tongue familiar with the lowest *argot* and filthiest scurrilities of the stews. He took orders only from his betters, and from no crowing verse-twister who fancied himself higher than the Most Christian King. He, Triboulet, was no such fool as not to tell dirt from diamonds, roses from carrots, dukes from dung-hill fowl.

France said curtly: "'Twas a dung-hill you dropped in, not long back; the trough would be no bad thing to wash your mouth withal. But do my bidding; like it or no, I am Master."

"*Tête bleue pleine de reliques!*" spluttered Triboulet, "Master you may be, but Masters have Masters. I know what I know. Rhône air is not always good for health, nor Anet air much better, mark you that, good Master-Fool Caillette the Second. And mark you this also, 'tis not you that has the King's most private ear, but he who finds his Majesty his pleasures. Many a dainty morsel have I brought to the King's notice. In our history 'tis always the mistress who governs the King's affairs—and who rules through the mistress? Beard of King Solomon, the one who finds her and puts her where she is."

"His Majesty would be pleased to know that," said France with cold contempt, but losing patience. He repeated the order he had given. In the *Salle* was an atmosphere of watching hostility and antagonism from creatures waiting to see how things would jump; it was like a jungle full of eyes, of faces unhuman or de-humanized; but some were human and friendly. A small boy, a pretty and intelligent child of eight or so whom all called Cupidon, the bastard son of one of the Female-Fools of Madame Louise, edged nearer to him anxiously as Triboulet's splay hands showed a difficulty in restraint. France had been kind to the child, remembering his own unhappy boyhood, and Cupidon was never so happy as when running errands for the Master-Fool or doing him little services.

Triboulet, quivering with rage and resentment, had not discharged his spleen. He ran through a list of girls and women, single, married to honest aristocrats or burghers, whom he claimed, with Poncest's aid, to have drawn within the King's clutches. "And there is another fine one at Anet he has a tooth for; 'tis not the stag only he hunts at Dreux. When a girl has only half a husband to her bed half the conquest is done already, and a few bottles of good wine to our trusty and well-beloved Seneschal at Rouen drug suspicions. And why not? '*Bon vin à boire, bon pain à manger, et belles filles à voir*'—give men those, and the world is in your hands. De Brézé doesn't fry fritters with the King for nothing, but, for all that, he'd be interested to know who else is his rival, and who egged his

father-in-law into this pretty Bourbon business, and then helped to get him out at a price. By St. Nitouche! Madame La Grant' Sénéchalle, for all she looks so cold, can melt like other Eve's daughters, but she has more wit to a little finger than Madame de Châteaubriant of whom his Majesty begins to tire already, and 'tis one thing to be Mistress-in-title and rule a realm, and quite another to be Mistress of a Fool and rule fools, monkeys and little servants. No, she is not for such as you—never for such as you. Hands off the King's goose——"

There were danger signals in France's eyes; this was intolerable. And yet he had heard St. Vallier's words about his daughter; had met the King so unexpectedly at Anet, and could not forget what he had hinted about rewards. Evidently Triboulet had been spying and prying. France's own good friends were away, or dead; Madame La Grande, Bourbon, Madame Suzanne and Queen Claude,* St. Vallier, Maclean. . . . The King, they said, was in Provence again; Bourbon and Pescara had failed in their attempt on Marseilles, and a half-expected effort of a Spanish Fleet to land at Monaco had been frustrated. No one knew exactly what the Imperialists were doing now; in Rome Pasquin was jesting about a missing Army. Triboulet felt himself secure. He shot bolts at a venture; or rather little stinging arrows of words, poisoned at the barbs. His distorted body shook with malicious fury. Everyone knew that a certain lady of whom he spoke had had her naked body painted for his Majesty, to show that there was more beauty than Madame de Châteaubriant's in the realm for écus and estates to buy; everyone knew that her last child was named Françoise; everyone knew what was scratched on the great chimney-piece at Loury in the Orleanais—how did the lines go?

" Dans ce pourpris, le Grand François Premier
Trouva toujours jouissance nouvelle.
Qu'il est heureux ce lieu qui seul recèle
Fleur de Beauté, Diane de Poitiers."

* The Queen died at Blois on October 26th, 1524, aged 25. She was buried very quietly.

By St. Pansard the Fools' Saint! Agnès Sorel was not so lovely as this lady who, Triboulet aiding, would one day rule the realm.

France, controlling himself with effort, waited for the torrent of splenetic words to end. Little Cupidon, shy and anxious, crept closer in sympathy. He whispered to the boy: "Tell Larzac and Taravant to come." These were men under his orders who, in emergencies, policed his tiny kingdom of men and beasts. But before they came Triboulet passed the confines of his master's patience, with some foul story of a spy-hole in a floor through which he pretended to have seen the King and Diane in a room below. France's fist shot out suddenly, and Triboulet crashed down heavily on the stone, rush-strewn floor. His fingers as he rose, dazed but furious, to his knees, fumbled at a mouth dripping blood and teeth. The Master-Fool turned to the two great fellows who entered: "Wash his mouth under the pump in the court; it needs it," he ordered with cold disgust. "Then thrash him dry, and send him to the kitchens. They lack a Fool there to make them sport." With a passing friendly pat to little Cupidon he went out.

§3

In the kitchens at the Tournelles Triboulet nursed his grievances. This was the last humiliation and indignity —to be soused and half-drowned, flogged before grinning underlings, hustled off to be a laughing-stock for scullions and turnspits! It was all the more galling to know that his rival had reduced him to the menial place once held by his old antagonist, Papa Caillette. Already the King's departure had robbed him of some of his emoluments, and now few tips from great lords would find their way into the woollen stocking where he hoarded his carefully-scraped fortune. Triboulet loved money; no more, for the present, could he look forward to crowns for cracking jokes at Madame Louise's banquets at the Tuileries, or to a sly currying of favour in that quarter. He was fain to content himself with humbler and meaner company; Poncest, Philibert Pilon—a bully bearing old galley-marks with

whom Poncest lodged—an under-cook, Jules Blaise, who liked an auditor for his many grumbles against society, and a little, shrewd, ferret-faced Italian, Sebastiano Zecco, once servant to the great astrologer and magician, Cornelius Agrippa at the Tour de Nesle. This Zecco was a useful friend to know, for Madame frequently consulted his master. Zecco's conversation was no less impressive because so much of it was interlarded with fragments of dog-Latin, Greek and Arabic, and other words unintelligible to his hearers. Triboulet and the rest could make little of his "apogees," "quesiteds," "Lords of the Third and Eighth Houses," "hylegs," "sextiles," "friendly trines," "cusps of the ascendants," or of his philtres, charms and "alixeterics." He was vain of his smattering of knowledge, and would sometimes profess to be able, with the aid of a little magic wand and jumbled patter, to change the temperature of the kitchens. When he pointed this way and that—to North and West, East and South—his wide-mouthed audience did indeed feel the invasion of ice-cold, tepid or sultry winds. When he unwrapped from layers of silk, flannel and Genoa velvet his great crystal, they could indeed see, or fancy they saw, things unrevealed to others. Under charlatanism the man had really picked up some smattering of knowledge. He had cures at tongue-tip and finger-ends for diseases great and small, in which powdered unicorn's horn, dried bats and mice, philosopher's eggs, dragon's blood, finger-nails and the like were mingled with such healing and useful drugs and simples as endive, sow-thistle, mercury, nightshade, sorrel, featherfew, saffron, angelica, herb grace, dittony root, pimpernel and red briar leaves.

Poncest, Pilon and Zecco were unattached hangers-on of the Court which harboured and fed several thousands, small and great. They did not despise the warmth and cheer of the kitchens, and it was no uncommon thing to find Triboulet over a flask in their company. Such men were useful to one thirsty for revenge. For a few sous Pilon would have obliged his friend very readily. The Master-Fool snatched an hour or so of solitude after night-fall by the river—the

Tournelles was opposite the Ile Notre-Dame.* Easy enough for half a dozen brave bullies to add another fish to those hidden in Seine mud and turbid waters. During recent discontents, the river had been a good and secret friend to many with enemies; a sudden rush, a stealthy push, a cry unheeded in the dark—it was very simple.

Zecco deprecated this. And very stupid, he commented. A bungling, clumsy business; unscientific. In his own country such matters were managed with more art. With a long upper-lip shot out contemptuously, he said that Pilon and his friends cut hairs with axes, used cannon to kill fleas. A few colourless drops were keys more powerful than St. Peter's, opening the gates of hell or heaven. He spoke of poisoned gloves, letters, rings, fruits, comfits, flowers, physic, wine. Marcus Aurelius was suspected in his day of using a knife poisoned on one side only to cut a favourite morsel for his brother, Lucius Verius. That was long centuries ago, and the art had been brought since to perfection. One might give orders to death, saying: "Come soon," "Come slowly." . . . Not that Zecco or his master ever dabbled in such matters; their business had been to help humanity by their skill and knowledge; to counsel, to warn, to aid disconsolate lovers (though love-philtres sometimes went awry) to study the celestial influences and omens and see when these were favourable to emprises. To pitch a man in a dirty river! It was barbaric; no civilized being would kill his worst enemy like that.

His little ferret-eyes glared at Pilon from under a greasy leather cap, pulled low over the forehead. The two came to a duel of words. Triboulet, huddled in a corner by one of the great chimneys, watched, brooded, put in a question now and then, and thought his thoughts. He did not want to dabble in anything unsafe—for himself. They said a Pope had come to grief like that, taking, by mistake, what he had meant for another. Zecco went on to speak at length about love potions; this interested Triboulet for the moment greatly. Nasty ingredients in most of these—and was

* Later L'Ile St. Louis.

it true that from such filth one could ensure a fair woman's love? Wild dreams came to him of fortune gained thusly; not to catch rich and lovely and high-born women for the King, but for himself, making them drunk with love-sickness, holding out empty hands for them to fill. And what, he asked, was really the simplest potion or philtre to attain such ends?

By St. Damian and St. Cosmo, the simplest and safest was one not in Zecco's pharmacopœia—the little Italian answered—but that which the common country folk used in his own land; a hair taken from a mad wolf's tail near its root. . . . He paused a moment, and winking at his companions said: "It must, of course, be taken while the wolf still lives."

Triboulet joined perforce in the laughter against himself, but saw small merit in such humour.

§4

The King had left Provence, not before a strange, frustrated amour at Manosque had made sober folk lift eyebrows and click lips. Mademoiselle de Voland, the beautiful young daughter of the Mayor, had handed him the keys of the town when he entered. A modest and virtuous girl, she could not fail to notice the interest taken in her by a sovereign whose whim was next to law, and whose violent attachments and attentions had been the ruin of so many. Rather than fall into his clutches she burnt her face with acid, sacrificing her beauty for ever. . . . Francis was at last fairly on the road to Italy; it was said that the Imperialists were retreating on the Adda—and by and by came news that Pavia was invested. In the early days of its tedious four months' siege the Court moved to Blois. Madame Louise preferred this to Paris; it was near Amboise, which she loved, and in Blois Forest she had a favourite little country house among green shades. Her frequent stomach-aches, her small grandchildren—even such vaster matters as the realm's troubles, of which her rejected passion and bitter vengeance were chief causes—were not permitted to interrupt Madame's amusements. It was rumoured that not a little of the money raised and meant for the war stuck to the thin, be-

ringed, grasping fingers of the King's mother. After Queen Claude's death Diane had transferred her service —at such time as duties and pleasures at Rouen or Anet left her free—to Madame's Household. Jennifer Ennis had a minor appointment at the Court.

A great company, though less numerous than when the King made his own changes and his progresses, went down from Paris. Madame must have splendour, must have her Fools and musicians and grotesques, must (though so many fine gentlemen of her old dallyings were now away) have gallants always hanging at her heels, to flatter her and feed her vanity. France Caillette took his own company to Blois. It had been in his mind to leave Triboulet in the Tournelles, but he relented; the under-Fool, having had his lesson, had been recently strangely docile and even obsequiously polite in his demeanour—remembering a wise Chinese saying that if one decides to bow at all, one should bow to the ground. He was not given full freedom, but from the kitchens, where he slept in company with Blaise, his disgruntled friend the under-cook, he was loosed now and then to join the party selected for the entertainment of Madame and her friends. Poncest, who had never actually lived in the Tournelles, but had his own squalid dwelling with Philibert Pilon in the Rue de la Planche-Mettray, remained in Paris. Madame was quite capable of finding lovers for herself, and her own bullies. Little Cupidon came down, France bringing the child himself, for he had taken a great fancy for him, which Cupidon returned with a hero-worship almost embarrassing. At a banquet Madame gave to a few chosen friends in her forest house, Cupidon, in the guise of the God after whom he had been dubbed, and bearing a bow and gilt-tipped shafts with Madame's colours, won the Regent's favour. He did France a hundred small services, and loved to think himself his master's little page.

It was a delight to France to be back in his own countryside, and after the vast, gloomy, malodorous rabbit-warren of the Tournelles, Blois Château was very bright and gay. Recent additions and re-furnishings had given it a new splendour of gilt and paint; to the

famous tapestries and pictures many from other Palaces had been added; there was notably a series, which he had not seen, of the Seven Sins. Each sin was personified by a female figure (this would have pleased Alec) except Sloth, who was represented as an old man nodding in a chariot drawn by two colossal snails. The tapestries of one great hall were woven with flowers and tropical birds and fruits of every colour and variety. Madame loved birds, and small dogs, and cats; her lap-dog Hapeguai, named after a little favourite dog of her son's which had died, when he was a boy, at Bléré, her green parrot Noë, and her white Persian cat, Blanche, accompanied her in all her wanderings. All three were in her cabinet one day when France came to take her orders about some entertainments; she asked him strange questions about the Constable, about St. Vallier and Diane, about the late conspiracy, which he answered respectfully but very guardedly. He came away with an uncomfortable feeling that suspicion and perhaps secret knowledge were beneath her assumed friendliness and frankness. He never liked Madame, and liked her less since her passion and vindictiveness had done so much harm to the realm and to the two great noblemen who had been his very good friends. Indeed, at Blois the whole atmosphere of the Court was fraught with something unreal, difficult, even sinister and ominous; so many were double-faced, artificial, intent on their own schemes and aggrandizement, while superficially charming and gracious. But, trying as best he might to follow "the good within himself," he did his duty as efficiently as he could—their Fool, but God's also, set for some inscrutable purpose to play a humble part on the world's stage. There was a jester once who, having no other means, danced and played the fool with all his might before Our Lady's image, and legend spoke of a poor shepherd who, having no other gift, brought his broken and discordant bag-pipe to the Manger of the little Saviour who, ignoring richer offerings, held out eager hands.

At least one long anticipated delight came to him. Jennifer Ennis, wild with relief and happiness, told him that Alec Maclean was safely back in France. A day

or two later a scribbled note from his friend, sent from Lyons, reached him. The writing was very awkward and shaky, for which Alec apologized, explaining that he was compelled henceforth to use his left hand and, for that matter, his right eye, the other having been left behind. He longed to see France again. Italy had finished him, as it had finished so many better men than he (he said), and now, with a small pension the Scottish Guard were giving him, he hoped some day to find his way back into Scotland and end his days among his own folk. Meantime the air of Touraine or the Blésois, and the sight of old comrades and friends still in the kingdom, would be salves for one tired eye; there was a little place at Bléré where he could stay quietly for a while—a mill on the Cher kept by a coustilier in the Guard he knew; Mackinnon was his name; he had married a Scottish wife, from the colony of Scots at Bourges. He would write again, and France must come later to see him. It was farewell for him to the drum, the fife, the neighing steed; but he was luckier than many, who, serving years in the wars, found their pay in a lost limb, and no money to buy a wooden one.

Through brown and golden autumn woods France rode one day to Bléré. How the old days came back, as he loitered on the little bridge, watched the dragon-flies and birds circling over weeds and stones, and the schools of lesser fish in the pools, and big fish leaping; the cattle and goats at the water's edge; the squat church, the trees under which another wandering player and his boy cracked the old jokes before gaping villagers. . . . He took half a bottle at the *Cheval Blanc;* the picture of the Princes playing cards, King Louis among them, with his long, straight hair, plumed, jewelled hat, wide, hanging sleeves, and collar of golden shells, still hung in its place. But that mys-tery of the kind, pretty lady and the ouche with the running stag would never be solved.

He found Alec at the mill, on the river bank a half-mile or so from the hamlet. His old friend had changed almost out of knowledge from the stalwart Guardsman who had ridden so gallantly away. "By St. Andrew,

France, seeing you is almost as good as seeing the hills and lochs of home, even if I can only see you with half my eyes, and shake hands with half my hands," he said. "In that scramble at Santa Chiara my left eye went—'twas a black-bill that did it—and the arm was hurt too badly to be saved; hatchet and boiling tar make poor surgeons. So here's your half-soldier, but all friend." They had much to talk about, but of Jennifer Ennis he would say little. Already she had been to Bléré to see him; what was the use now? He had asked her once when he was whole, and she had said nay; well, that was over and ended; there should be no more asking of her or any other. A fine husband would he make now for any lass! She had been kind enough, 'twas true, but he asked no pity. . . . He spoke more of friends who had been less to him than she. His face was pale and lined, the cheek-bones prominent, the skin blotched unwholesomely where had been wholesome freckles; his missing arm hurt him much more now and then as if it were still there—well, 'twas but war's wreckage, and he luckier than many others.

France asked him to come, when he was well enough, to Blois. "Maybe," he answered, but added sadly after a pause: "She wanted me to come; but what use now, lad? I were best in my own country again, and shall go there as soon as I am well enough, and can scrape enough silver to go with. Even the litter over Alps jerked me to a blancmanger. 'Tis pleasant here by the Cher, and the folk are kind; but one tires of watching trees and water, and fowls and ducks, and fish jumping, and mill-sails ever turning. As I lie in my bed sometimes I see them turning from my window against yellow dawn; and it seems to me, France, this world is just a black mill with sails turning, and stones grinding; but what is being ground out of it all God Himself knows."

In later autumn, things going none too well in the realm or in Italy, Madame Louise must have her Cornelius Agrippa to read destinies from his stars and "scry" in crystal and beryl; Sebastiano Zecco, his leather cap greasier than ever, came with his old master. He and Triboulet had many talks. The under-Fool

now had the keeping of the dogs and the apes in the *Salle* at Blois, though he still kept his kitchen bed, which Blaise shared.

Noël came; in Italy the siege still dragged. Alec was better and stronger. His second eye was still on Scotland and a little stone cabin in the Highlands, which, with luck, he might by and by be having. He came to Blois just after Christmas for a week or two, but in a surly mood, angry with himself for not having resolution to refuse France's invitation. He met Jennifer Ennis frequently, and was always quarrelsome and testy and rough, though the girl gave him tit for tat. It seemed they could not do without sight of one another, and yet when they met must spar and have hot words. Perhaps she waited for another question; perhaps half-invited it. But if so it did not come. "There are two best seats in heaven where folk may be merry all the day long," Alec told her once when they had quarrelled for an hour on end. "And what are they?" she asked incautiously. "Those where the bachelors and spinsters sit apart," he answered. "By St. Susanne," she cried in a good flash, "I hope then we may some day sit on them apart, for I would as soon hear three owls in a wood as a man ask me to marry." But she bit her lip when she had said it, and looked shamed.

§5

On the Eve of Twelfth-Day Blois prepared itself for the Feasts of Kings. Melchior tried on for the dozenth time his white wig and long white beard; Caspar his red wig, and shaved his chin close by taper-light; Balthasar made his face and limbs swarthy with walnut juice. They were to symbolize the three ages, worshipping a little child; the first senility, the second youth, the third lusty prime. Frankincense, gold, myrrh, the iron circle of seven candles which, let down from the church roof by a rope, was to signify the fall of Lucifer, were all ready. In the kitchens the Grand Cuisinier and his underlings, Blaise among them, had food and wines for the festivities; most important of all, the spices, Narbonne honey, flour, ginger and pepper with which the

Twelfth-Night cakes were to be made, and the beans which were to make plain folk Kings and Queens.

Diane had been helping little Prince Henri, now eight years old, to mend a sheep for his Epiphany crib. He was tall for his age, agile, very dark and with large, sombre eyes; his mouth showed a sweetness of disposition, though the whole expression was somewhat too melancholy and heavy for a child. They said he was jealous of his elder brother, the Dauphin, and reticent and difficult with Madame. With Diane, who spent much time with the little Prince, playing with him, teaching him to hold the reins of his dappled pony, helping him to make tiny wax or clay models of sovereigns, men-at-arms, monks, saints, animals (he was deft with his fingers) Henri was always docile, gentle, talkative; he loved her, and followed her everywhere. France had seen little of her lately, and when he did she seemed almost to have forgotten gratitude for his help in saving her father—not that he wanted it. Sometimes she had been strained and distant.

He wondered if rumours he himself had heard had reached her. He wondered if she knew those sinister words her father had spoken which had reached his ears when St. Vallier was snatched from death—that his daughter's sex and pretty face had saved him. . . . "*The King's Goose*"?

He wondered.

She looked so innocent, so girlish, playing with the little Prince who adored her—telling him legends of the countryside, teaching him nursery songs, some of her own making. There was one funny rhyme about old King Dagobert which sent him into fits of an odd, solemn laughter. But once when France came on them suddenly together she stopped abruptly, gave him a strange, distant look, and, as if involuntarily, drew Henri aside, almost as if she did not wish King Francis's son to have traffic with King Francis's Fool.

But that was absurd; and her moods, which he had never been able to understand, changed so quickly that on that very afternoon (it was within a few days then of Twelfth-Day) she sought France out at the *Salle des Fous*, having the little Prince by the hand, and said

that for the boy's pleasure she was devising a Twelfth-Night party in Queen Anne's Breton farmhouse; they must have a great cake. On Twelfth-Night in Normandy, where she was Sénéchalle, they had a custom of their own—a child hidden under a table covered with a long cloth said to whom each slice should be given, until the mock sovereign of the night was found. Would France arrange this? and Cupidon, his little page, must be the boy to call the names. He must bring others to make merriment for the company, and themselves join in the sport.

Now, on Twelfth-Night Eve, all was almost in readiness.

In the great bed he shared with Blaise, in an alcove of the kitchens, Triboulet lay sleepless. He, too, was almost ready. A pitiful craven, the under-Fool had tried feebly to find an easier alternative than the plan to which malice, jealousy, ambition and revenge were driving him. Schemes over which he had thought painfully had all miscarried. Afraid to write openly, he had scrawled and despatched anonymous letters; to Madame La Grant' Sénéchalle telling her that the Master-Fool had been in the conspiracy, had urged St. Vallier on, had played a double part with her, hoping to win her favour by saving the life he had helped to jeopardize; to Madame the Regent; to Monseigneur de Brézé, warning him of the Master-Fool, and urging him to keep closer guard over his young and pretty wife. But not one to whom he had written had made any sign. He was tired of bowing low to a rival he hated, and the small kindnesses France showed him only added fuel to his consuming rage and malice. Yet it was policy to humble oneself even to the dust. He had brought with him his stocking of savings, and, not trusting the company in which he found himself, had hidden it with the crafty guile of the peasant stock from which he came; when he counted out, secretly, the angelots, écus, deniers, his heart sank with the steady sinking of his hoard. Yet only with money could he buy revenge, and men ready enough to sympathize or to grumble were not equally ready to take risks for another unless it were very well worth while. He had to work cautiously, hiding his plans.

Sebastiano Zecco was willing enough to sell him—pretty dearly—a tiny phial of stuff to put out of its misery a turnspit dog that had been burnt by a falling log. The Italian's eyes were screened like a bird's when he spoke of the costliness of the ingredients he had used, and warned him that even two or three of these colourless drops were keys to other worlds; Triboulet must guard against their falling into dangerous hands. . . . Jules Blaise was more difficult. The fellow had grains of honesty; here it was necessary to be very careful. With him, Triboulet dropped no hint of his real intention; admitting his hatred for his rival, he said that policy made it advisable to serve and flatter in hope of future favours, and, again at a heavy price, Blaise promised his help. . . . In ways even more subtle little Cupidon, innocent of all guile, was drawn into the plot. To serve and please France, Cupidon would readily have promised anything. The under-Fool played on the child's love for his master. Cupidon's distrust of Triboulet slowly vanished and became liking as he was persuaded that the old quarrel was forgotten and forgiven; that out of gratitude for forgiveness Triboulet had devised a plan which would surely earn France Caillette's approval and thanks. But it must be a secret; a dead secret, for the present, between Cupidon and the man who so generously took him into confidence and enlisted his help. He must do exactly as Triboulet told him, and breathe never a word to any living soul.

Cupidon was all ears, and eagerness, proving an apt pupil, though his comical airs of secrecy came near to making him suspect, and once he puzzled France by blurting out that he had a surprise for him on Twelfth-Night, but must not tell him what it was. France pinched the boy's ear and pretended intense curiosity and delight, imagining it to be some tiny gift Cupidon had saved his *sous* to buy.

§6

An hour before the first saffron gleam of dawn entered the barred windows of the kitchens, Triboulet got stealthily out of bed. Glowing embers of last

night's fire served to give him sufficient light. Blaise, on his back, snored lustily. Very cautiously Triboulet took from under the wooden pillow where he had hidden it in a crevice of the wood, the tiny phial, wrapped carefully in flannel. Two or three colourless drops—and, even for a grown man, Zecco had assured him, the gates of purgatory, heaven, hell, would fly open. . . . At some time, late or soon, all must die. . . .

He fought back last scruples, last fears. This subtle poison would leave no trace when its work was done.

Here, in its pan ready for the oven, so that it might be served crisp and hot when day ended, were the mixed flour, honey, spices, pepper, ginger, for Diane's Twelfth-Night cake. The bean by which the King or Queen of the Feast was to be chosen was on the trestled board close at hand. . . .

He crawled in again beside Blaise, his heart in a beat like the scurry of swift hoofs. The dark now filled itself with strange apprehensions and terrors; and day, when it came, he feared also, wondering where its close might find him. On a desperate throw of the dice all was staked; all to be won—or lost. Very fervently he prayed St. Pansard and St. Nitouche, patrons of Fools, to aid him—and to the Virgin and many saints that success might be forgiven, yet not hindered. He promised fat candles at favourite shrines when his salary as Fool-in-title was paid.

CHAPTER XXVIII THE TWELFTH-NIGHT KISS

Romeo: "Here's to my love!" (Drinks)
O true apothecary!
Thy drugs are quick.
Thus with a kiss I die.

ROMEO AND JULIET, ACT V, SC. III.

§1

IN the church of St. Nicholas at Blois three priests dressed as the three Kings and with servants carrying gifts of frankincense, gold and myrrh, had come from different corners to the high altar; the time-honoured

dialogue, the Precentor's responsary, the procession through the nave, the lighting of the Star—shaped like a Cross, and set in a great gilded crown, the announcement of the winged boy-angel that all things prophesied of old were now fulfilled, the dropping of the iron circle with its seven tapers, showing the fall of Lucifer—all these ceremonies were at last over, and the congregation trooped out into winter sunshine. Alec Maclean and Jennifer Ennis dipped fingers together in the stoup. They must needs quarrel before many yards. Each wanted each; yet he had done his asking once and for all, with no for answer, and, crippled as he was, would never ask again. She knew it. When their little general sparring was over, they turned towards the river bank instead of taking the steps up to the Château and walked on together in a spell of unusual silence, each thinking. The girl was difficult and proud also. She fought a battle within herself. Was it not humility that won the world? Had not this little Child they honoured taken to himself humility, bedding among asses and kine? Alec needed her now and loved her, but was too proud to ask again, and soon these golden hours would be over, and he back in Bléré and long loneliness, if neither spoke—and she in her loneliness at Blois.

She said suddenly: "I am weary of my service here, and think I shall soon leave it. Madame grows past bearing. Nothing is right."

"'Tis the way of women," said Alec gruffly. "Give them the moon, and soon 'tis, 'why have you not fetched down some stars for me?' I was not tired of my service, and would be fighting yet if I might. But I am tired of watching sails go round, and water flowing, and hens laying eggs for other hens to come out and lay more eggs till Doomsday. Scotland is a better land to grow old and die in than this."

She said: "I should like it well if I lived there, but death should be a far-off tale for both. And I have money enough and to spare. If——" But she could not finish what was in her mind, at least not so abruptly. She said instead: "Alec, I heard when I was in Scotland of an old man dying who had wished all his long

life to marry, but thought 'twas the women who had to speak." Her breath caught as she said it, in a rush.

For many seconds he did not answer.

"I have always thought that," he said at last roughly, "for though the man thinks he asks, 'tis always the woman asks first. Had there not been Madame Eve, Adam would have needed no breeches; it was she who asked."

"And I," she said, in a voice very low, but just loud enough for him to hear: "I too am a woman, and ask. Oh, Alec, I never meant my 'No.' And now I cannot for my pride's sake lose happiness, nor you for yours."

"What, marry half a man?"

"Rather you than twice another. We can go to Scotland——"

"In broad Scotland there'll be no house big enough for us two, Jennifer. We should quarrel day in and night out."

"And day in and night out make it up, and be faster friends and better lovers. And is it a house I would marry? There was once a song I knew:

'Now all ye ladies of fair Scotland,
And ladies of England that happy would prove,
Marry never for house, nor marry for land,
Nor marry for nothing but only love.'

Alec, *please* say 'yes' and do not shame me."

"But you said 'no' to me."

"Which is all the reason for your saying 'yes' to me, or for once we should agree."

He laughed, and put his single arm about her and his lips to hers; and there was no need for either "yes" or "no."

§2

In the Pavilion which Queen Anne had built after the fashion of the old farm-houses in her Brittany, all was set for the Twelfth-Night Feast. Without were cold, and darkness, and naked trees shivering in an icy river-wind; within jollity, warmth, mirth, and good

cheer. On trestled tables were spread dishes for the banquet, wines, dulcets and fruit. Diane was there, looking very fresh and lovely in a simple dress of white and silver edged with snow-white fur; with her was the little Prince in black velvet and Spanish lace; the boy's sombre eyes sparkled with shy expectancy and delight. From the windows of the Pavilion, looking across the garden and the leafless trees of the park, one could see the lit windows of the great Château where they kept their statelier feast. Madame had given Diane leave to have her own friends here in the Pavilion, which, since good Queen Anne's days, had been little used. Recently Diane had chosen a motto for herself; it was "*Consequitur quodcumque petit*"; and, indeed, what she wanted in life she found generally some means to have. The little lad who clung to her was to discover that before very many years.

Fresh rushes had been strewn; flags and evergreens hung from rafters and walls. The Pavilion had always been simply furnished, and such carpets as had been used in the old Queen's time had been discarded, or taken for use elsewhere. The fire of huge logs from Blois Forest blazed and roared and crackled and cast dancing shadows. A diminutive gallery, reached by spiral wooden stairs at the back of the hall, was for musicians and such guests as chose to be spectators rather than take part. Viols and lutes and other instruments made merry and melancholy music in keeping with the day. Alec Maclean had come, and sat in a great chair kept specially for him; Jennifer stood by him, radiantly happy, and (for a time) keeping the peace. Already their news was out, and faces round them smiled congratulations. Diane herself called for the toast to their prosperity and long life together, wishing them (was there irony in her words?) such happiness as fortunate marriage had brought to her and to her husband. France, glad of his friends' joy, in which he had had some little secret share, felt none the less at this happy tide his own unhappiness and loneliness. But for a few brief hours, at least, he was with Diane, and she friendly and smiling and happy; he must snatch such passing pleasure as he might.

For a few brief hours—when all were merry and glad—he would cast away care. He wore, as Master of the Revels, his best Fool's habit, of fine silk in the royal colours and with the salamander on back and breast, a girdle of gilded leather, long-toed red morocco shoes, gilded bells on his cap that jangled as he walked; some were those he had bought long ago at Amboise for Lisette. His wand, stout and long, had the painted Fool's head at the end. It was Diane's feast; for her he would play Fool to-night ungrudgingly, hurt him as it might.

Jennifer Ennis, while Diane welcomed the guests, had gone over to the little Prince; she was telling him how they kept this day in ancient Rome, in England, in Scotland—there they put in the Twelfth-Night cake not only the bean which made someone King, but a pea for Queen, a clove for Knave. In France it was the bean which made the King or Queen of the night. He should see. Perhaps the lot might even fall on him.

"But if my brothers were not older than I, I should be a real King, some day," he said gravely.

She tried to teach him an old English Twelfth-Night song, about Twelve Lords a-leaping, Eleven Ladies a-dancing, Ten Pipers a-playing, Nine Drummers a-drumming, and, in odd broken English, he attempted to say it after her; but his eyes wandered to Diane, and when she was free he ran to her.

Several gentlemen and ladies of the Court had been invited. In addition to the minstrels in the little gilded gallery, France had brought with him his selected "horse-load of Fools." They had much license on this day, and played innumerable pranks, growing more and more free as the great jugs of claret and other wines went round the company. Because it was the season of forgiveness and good will, France had told Triboulet, several days earlier, that he might be of the number. But Triboulet was moody and in poor vein; his jokes and pranks fell flat.

At last the music struck up lively strains for the entrance of the great cake which was to commence the climax of the day's entertainment. The Grand Cuisinier was at Madame the Regent's service to-night, and

under-cooks, Blaise at their head, brought it in, with its escort bearing torches; the flames flickered on Blaise's knife. Little Cupidon, curly-haired and rosy-cheeked, crawled at a sign from Diane beneath a table, the cloth almost hiding him from view. All clustered round as the cake was cut into slices equalling the number of those who were to take part.

Blaise cried in a great voice, holding up the first slice: "*Fabe Domini pour qui?*"

Cupidon, carefully coached, answered from beneath the table, in his shrill boyish treble, which shook a little with excitement: "*Pour le Bon Dieu.*"

The slice was put in the wicker-basket reserved for fragments of the feast to be given to the poor of Blois.

"*Pour qui?*"

Cupidon had mastered his string of names. He said, choosing from them one at random: "*Monseigneur le Comte de la Bigne.*"

The guests and zanies clustered round; no, he had not the bean.

"*Madame de Bounay la Roque.*"

Again the press of curious, eager faces; handsome faces, scarred and commonplace faces, pretty faces of high-born women, grotesque faces of capped and belled fools. Yes—no, *no*. *Madame La Grant' Sénéchalle.*" It was her feast, but—no, the bean was not for her. "*Monsieur Maclean.*" Cupidon struggled bravely with his name, and later with that of Jennifer Ennis. . . . No. . . . . No. "*The Seigneur 'de la Meileraye*"—"*Madame la Comtesse de Gordes-Simiane*"—— But the old Countess, volatile, lively as a cricket, much be-painted and be-wigged, made a comical *moue* of disappointment; no sovereignty for her; she had missed her chance (she said) when old King Louis was a lad, many long years ago.

"*Triboulet!*"

The long, ape-like, hairy arm shot out; the vast splaying paw clutched his portion; he peered and picked, trying to find the bean as a monkey might seek out its flea. . . . Droll if this fool were to be King of Twelfth-Night. No; Triboulet gave a howl of disappointment, and feigned incontrollable sobs.

Cupidon (how well the boy had learnt his part!) sang out in his piping treble three more names. "*Capitaine de Mare—Mademoiselle Vilvert—Monsieur de Flers*"

. . .

Oh, very well had the little lad beneath the hanging cloth learnt his part which was to bring such eminence and such pleasure to his master. He counted the names on his fingers; Triboulet, de Mare, Vilvert—de Flers; three names following that of the under-Fool.

In the gallery several spectators had joined the musicians; it was full; half in shadow, one saw dim forms, a splash here and there of vivid colour—the blue or scarlet of a uniform, the changing sheen of satin or silk in flickering torch or candle light. . . . Down below, they were a long time finding the bean. Already twelves names had been called—and the thirteenth must certainly be unlucky.

Cupidon, when Blaise raised aloft the next slice, crying for the thirteenth time: "*Fabe Domini pour qui?*" excelled himself. He had been saving breath for this. The great moment had come. In a shrill voice ringing to the blackened rafters he shouted, like some herald crying titles of nobility:

"*His Most Christian Majesty's Master-Fool, France Caillette, Governor of Ribauds, Fools, Monkeys and Little Servants!*"

France took the proffered slice mechanically; broke and began to eat; the bean was there. He held it high aloft for a second before putting it in his mouth. All the hall was in clamour. Over the edge of the balcony the musicians and the onlookers bent to see better. "*Il a trouvé la fève au gateau!*" "*Le Fou-en-titre est le Roy de la Fève!*" All were shouting together; men and women pressing on France to give him their congratulations and their homage. Old Madame de Gordes-Simiane, painted, powdered, be-wigged, dropped him a profound curtsey, and said aside to those near her that perhaps her chance had come at last—to be Queen-Consort of this King of *Ribauds*, Fools, Monkeys, Little Servants—and *the Bean*.

Laughing and shouting they lifted him aloft before the crowning, as the old custom was. He was hoisted

until the tips of his fingers could just touch the lower rafters, and then lowered again, and carried to a chair covered by a cloth of state on a dais, with an empty chair beside it. Little Cupidon crawled out from beneath the curtains, eager for congratulations; Diane and Jennifer and other ladies kissed the pretty boy; he went, all smiles, but half embarrassed shyness, to France's side. The crown of gilded Rouen cardboard was brought forward and set on the Master-Fool's dark head. And now he must choose his Court for the night —and choose his Queen. A robe trimmed with ermine (moth had fretted the fur) was flung over his pied habit, and in his hand was placed, for a sceptre, the thick-stemmed marotte tipped with the brightly-painted Fool's head. More than one then present whispered that never had his likeness to the Bourbons been more marked than when the Fool whom Charles de Bourbon had befriended became their Twelfth-Night King. Tall, graceful, perfectly proportioned, singularly handsome, with his soft, dark, lustrous eyes, the perfect oval of his face, the nose slightly aquiline, his whole air was one of natural distinction—even majesty—which even the bizarre garb did not lessen. It was hard to believe that the son and successor of poor, foolish Papa Caillette stood before them and, though the mystery of his birth was now for ever insoluble, not a few questioned whether the old rumour might not after all be true. More regal in his bearing than even King Francis himself, he named the members of his mimic Court, choosing the last first. Little Cupidon was to be his page; Triboulet his Fool-in-title, King of *Ribauds*, Governor of Fools, Monkeys and Little Servants. It was a dismal enough caper Triboulet cut, and a lugubrious, anxious face that acknowledged the honour fallen to him. Blaise was to be his Grand Cuisinier; Maclean be Captain of his Guard; the Comte de la Bigne his Chamberlain; his Master of the Horse—and Asses—Capitaine de Mare; the old Seigneur de Hugueville Grand Falconer, and Governor of the royal Parrots and Geese. The Seigneur, a jolly old fellow with a hooked nose and snow-white hair always in a plume or crest, added his chuckles to the laughter against himself. For each who

came to do homage France had a witty word or two of welcome.

Madame la Comtesse de Gordes-Simiane was to be Mistress of the Robes to Her Majesty the Queen, and (but on strict condition that each married within a year) Mademoiselle Vilvert and Mademoiselle Ennis Ladies of Honour. . . . A dozen laughing voices cried: "But, Sire, the Queen is not yet chosen." He stood for a few moments in silence, all watching, but all knowing on whom the choice must now fall. A flush coloured his face, showing through the pale tan, and in heart and brain was fierce if brief contest of emotions, desires, inhibitions. Oh, it was his night of triumph and success, mockery and illusion as all was. He was fated to play parts, to be mimic, actor, Fool—a soldier with sword of lath, a sovereign with bauble for sceptre, a lover in a comedy where farce and tragedy joined hands. Strange visions of his past life flashed before him, as, some said, they passed before the minds of dying men. He saw a glade in the woods between Amboise and Bléré—himself a little boy, with a fallen tree for throne, playing good King Louis; Papa seeking admission to the *Logis du Roy* at Loches; Lisette in her bells and finery, an officious lord barring entrance to the Court. Oh, those long, long afternoons of childhood, when a little sunshine made him happy —a crust of bread, an unaccustomed word of kindness, a flower, a dragon-fly dipping in crystal water. . . . On this winter's night he had his hour of sunshine. It was Diane's feast; with the King away, De Brézé away, he and she might be as they had been, happy together until the Cinderella hour struck and the gilded coach became pumpkin again, the white horses in their gorgeous panoply vermin, the glittering costumes rags.

How lovely she was—and in her eyes, wide now with interest, was the old friendliness. "*When you claim a kiss, France, you may always have it.*" Why not eat, and drink, and be merry—for the heart stayed, and youth had not departed, and the rose had not faded, and the sweet tale had not all been told?

§3

He said: "The Prince Henri, first page in honour to her Majesty," and paused again. When his Queen for the night had been chosen he must give the speech from the throne to his loving subjects—the King's Speech—and after that the Cup-Bearer would present the cup, and wine would circulate, and decorum be lost in mirth, and——

St. Vallier's words, slipping out in the joyous hysteria following the reprieve—all the rumours that would not be suppressed—De Brézé's brutality at Blois and Diane's resentment—flashed through his mind. Oh, if he might snatch this brief, fierce happiness; snatch such chance as the abandon of the Feast might give! Yet he loved her so much. . . . The good within struggled against the ill.

He hesitated again; voices murmured: "The Queen! Your Majesty, name your Queen!" Over the gilded and tapestried balustrade of the little minstrels' gallery spectators leant, adding their excited voices to those of the company beneath. Some had drifted in from the Palace; Madame was unwell, and had given all but a few chosen guests early dismissal.

France descended from the little dais, and came slowly towards Diane; she flushed and hesitated in her turn. Then suddenly she curtseyed, and her eyes met his—was it only fancy that he saw in them the look she had given the King, given him also, at Anet when Francis spoke lightly about reward? He had to keep iron command of himself; but his battle was already won. "*Noël! Noël! Noël!*" shouted the audience—(it was how their real Kings were greeted)—as he, who, were certain rumours true, might indeed be of royal blood, led his Queen to the dais.

(How hot it was! Without, the winter night was misty and very cold; in the brief pauses of the instruments the river wind was heard sighing among naked and frosted trees. His head throbbed—and how sickly-sweet the cake had been—and how visions and images of the past came thronging, bringing back trifles, words even, that he had thought long forgotten!)

He rose to speak, the thrill that her touch had given him still lingering. But those who expected the usual farrago of clowning and hackneyed insolencies and bawdy jests were disappointed. There were wit, humour, irony; yet underlying his words ran a strange earnestness. As he warmed to his speech (it was very brief) he forgot his motley, and became, for the time, a King indeed speaking to his subjects. Yet what Kings valued most and aimed at he ignored; and spoke instead of the things that Kings often ignored or slighted; peace on earth, brotherliness, humility, mercy, pity. He would have a realm and a world merry and friendly together, which should remember that great and small, rich and poor, must in the end be equal bed-mates. Let each of his loving subjects follow the Star in his own heart. . . .

"By St. Joseph!" muttered the old Seigneur de Hugueville, smoothing his ruffled plume with a thin, blue-veined hand, "Queen Anne's Confessor might be preaching again in this very hall."

When France finished, the Cup-Bearer for the night, a young Breton gentleman named Rochejacquelin, whom he had known long ago as a page at Loches, presented the mazer for the King to drink. He put his lips to the silver-gilt rim; as he drank the old, time-honoured cry rang out:

"*Le Roy boit! Le Roy boit!*"

It was the signal for the real merriment of the night to begin. In the gallery the musicians scraped or plucked at strings, ready for their next lively minstrelsy; a renewed commotion among the guests interrupted them, as France, bowing to Diane, handed her the mazer. At the lower end of the hall servants, losing no time, were already tossing aside rushes and taking boards from trestles to make room when the cry "A Hall! A Hall!" gave the signal for dances and games. France's eyes and Diane's met; for a space of time almost imperceptible she hesitated, then, with a deep curtsey, took the bowl in her two small hands.

In the gallery, not very lofty, was the noise of a sudden rush; a string snapped with a jangling whirr as a musician was thrust roughly aside, and an oath

of startled anger came from one of the spectators who had been jostled brusquely from his place. For an instant the strong, scarred, hideous face of De Brézé showed above the balustrade. His features were distorted with anger; the bloodshot eyes, always straining from their sockets, glared towards the dais. He clambered over, clinging with one hand to the edge and then dropping—it was not more than seven or eight feet to fall—into the heap of piled rushes just below. Clouds of dust mingled with the heated air.

Triboulet's eyes started; he gave an inarticulate cry, instantly suppressed. Then his anonymous letter to the Seneschal had not miscarried—had not been disregarded or ignored! De Brézé, biding and choosing his time, must have come secretly from Rouen before the end of Noël, entered the minstrels' gallery unobserved, and seen his wife on the dais with the Master-Fool. Neither Diane nor any other had noticed him in the semi-darkness of the hiding-place from which fury at length drove him. Needless, perhaps, after all, Triboulet's patient scheming, and the last despairing throw of the dice that was to bring fortune or ruin. . . . A few colourless drops—and then the gates of other worlds flung open. . . . Oh, he had paid a heavy price for what had been already, perhaps, in his grasp. Zecco had said that the poison took some little time to set a man's soul free. The under-Fool's fingers pressed against his trembling lips and fumbled at them nervously. He had kept an anxious eye on his rival's face, but had seen little; at the merest twitch of a muscle, an eyelid, at a slurred word, the change of light and shade with the flicker of torch or candle, the sign of hesitation or of oppression due to heat and clamour, Triboulet's heart had jumped and stood still for an instant; he marvelled that this business should take so long.

And now the Seneschal had come; in the very act of taking the mazer from France's hands Diane had heard the commotion at the lower end of the hall, and had glanced round. The maple bowl slipped from her grasp, but France saved it, though the wine leapt and splashed, falling in a blood-red rain among the rushes.

De Brézé, with his head lowered, his hump very conspicuous, one foot dragging a little, charged forward like a boar wounded and dangerous; so must his father have looked when he found his wife and her lover. His dagger was out, glittering in the dancing light. He flung himself upon France, but before the blow fell Alec Maclean had snatched up the Master-Fool's stout marotte—resting against the improvised throne—in the hand still left him; the dagger shot from De Brézé's grasp, and clattered down at France Caillette's feet; the Seneschal, crashing in the violence of his onrush against the dais, lay dazed and helpless before the man he had tried to kill. In a flash France had the dagger-point at his throat.

All watched in tense silence. For a full half-minute he held him there. Then he slowly straightened himself, and stood erect over his prostrate rival, and said in a strangely broken voice: "You have robbed me of all—you, to whom God had given so much. Why should I spare you?" But with a great effort he flung the jewelled dagger like a dart into the arras, where it stuck all a-quiver. A sudden shudder ran through him. "Oh, I am cold," he said, in a low startled voice, and again: "How cold it grows—and how the lights fail!" He passed a hand across his eyes. "More logs," he cried, "and bring fresh torches. . . . Monseigneur, sit on yonder bench and stir not; Capitaine de Mare, let him be guarded. 'Tis but a Christmas game, and there is no disloyalty here. But I am King to-night, and my Queen shall drink with me before the night closes." He called to Rochejacquelin: "Wine, Rochejacquelin." At Loches, long ago, Rochejacquelin had given him his orders; but now hastened to obey.

The voice which had faltered a little strengthened and was clear as a bell. He put the re-filled mazer into Diane's hands. "My Queen, 'tis our own little hour before lights go and fires burn, as all lights and fires burn out at last. You must drink, and I again after you." His voice dropped to a whisper; he swayed, but recovered. "My throat is dry; 'tis the dust from the rushes. . . . But, oh, how cold it grows. . . . Why do they not bring logs? And the hall grows so dark——"

She sipped at his order, but her eyes watched him; when he took the mazer from her his hands trembled, and he had difficulty when he tried to drink. But few noticed this.

"*La Reyne boit! Le Roy boit! Noël, Noël; Vive le Roy et la Reyne de la Fève!*"

In the midst of the shouting, lively music struck up. France glanced towards the gallery—but with unseeing eyes. What he saw, beyond the present, behind the fallen arras of years, was a boy and girl in a summer garden; a boy and girl riding in Dauphiny mountains and valleys; a lad and lass plighting love in their own odd and guarded fashion by a river rosed with sunset. But how dark it grew! In a loud voice, clear and resonant, he cried suddenly: "*What is that?*" And then again: "The room blurs—I can hardly see—— Oh, what is it? *Diane, Oh Diane!*"

She caught him as he was falling; in a passion of concern and pity kissed, again and again, and without any asking now, or regard for watching eyes, the handsome, puzzled face so close to her. "Oh, France, France! Cupidon—Henri—run to the Château for a priest, for one of Madame's surgeons." The little bastard son of a Female-Fool—the little son of a great King—started to brave the terrors of the dark, wintry garden and of the Park, but Triboulet intercepted them. "No, I will go and bring them," he said, and hurried out. France's eyes had slowly closed—all his world about him, its tawdry pomp and glitter, sank; but Jennifer Ennis found a restorative which, for a few brief moments, held him to life. His eyes opened wide, and in them were wonder and awe. Then, seeing friendly anxious faces bent over him, he smiled; at Alec, at Jennifer, but it was on Diane his eyes rested. He tried to speak, but words failed him. On her knees now she bent to kiss him—"*Oh, tell the minstrels to stop!*"

It was in her arms he died, with only the slightest spasm and the tiniest sigh to mark the gentle passing. And in death, as on the graven face of the Fool who bends over space at Loches, was that inscrutable smile—of pity, perhaps, for mortals playing their petty parts against the changing tapestries of the world, perhaps

even a little cynical—— Yet some who saw him, before they covered him with the cloth under which Cupidon had played his own tiny part, spoke of the happiness and peace of this still smiling face, turned towards death as if the heart stayed, and youth had not departed from him, and the rose was unfaded, and the tale not all told.

§4

In the dark garden, under bare and frosted trees, Triboulet, a Judas who had betrayed and killed his master, heard the music fall into sudden silence at Diane's order. He was in no haste to reach the Château. Not with cold only did he shudder and not the vague eeriness of the night only, with its sounds and stillnesses, and the vague terrors lurking in river-mist and in darkness, did he fear. He wished De Brézé had saved him from this. . . . But he had been wise to write nothing about the King; the Seneschal would surely stand his friend, and Zecco's tincture was worth its price. It was a stuff that could keep secrets. "By St. Pansard," he muttered between chattering teeth, "I am Master-Fool to his Majesty at last," and, as he went slowly up the steps to the Palace, wondered if he need buy so many candles as he had promised. Perhaps it might be cheaper to keep Faith with Our Lady and the Saints.

But in the year that had just opened Francis had no need for Master-Fools; at Pavia, a few weeks after Twelfth-Night, he played Master-Fool himself for a world to laugh at, or pity, losing sword and liberty and sceptre—all, he wrote, save honour and his life. Bourbon's hour of triumph had come. Diane had gone with her husband into Normandy; it was rumoured that he was to succeed D'Alençon as Governor, and that St. Vallier would soon be released. On the day that the Seneschal, in great state with the Bishops of Lisieux and of Evreux and other dignitaries supporting him, announced at Rouen the capture of the King, Alec Maclean and Jennifer Ennis were married very quietly at the little Church at Bléré, going afterwards by the

Loire into Brittany, where, in early summer, they took ship at Roscoff for Scotland.

To their little Highland cottage where they loved and quarrelled and, again and always, loved, came rumours now and then as from a world of painted shadows known once in dreams. Vague rumours; of a woman whose freshness and beauty defied the passing years; a wife loving and discreet; a widow keeping her dead husband in perpetual memory; a Prince's friend—a King's mistress. . . . What she meant to have, she had. . . . Palaces, jewels, lands, power, books and treasures of art, gold, beauty, perpetual youth. The horoscope said rightly that, one day, Diane would govern all—but at a price.

" Be comforted, good madam, the great rage
You see is cured in him."

She had such comfort as she sought; while God on His hill, seeing the shadows fly and the wings of His servants, Time and Death, sweeping ashes of youth, loveliness, valour, strength, kingship, laughed at fools—not without pity.

Diane, who was never to grow old and die, lived for more than forty years after France's death; it was written by one who saw her at the end that she kept her youth and beauty unchanged.

France, in the memories and hearts of his old friends, stayed also—unchanged and young. In their chimney-corner Alec and Jennifer had hung a marotte which had been the bauble of a Fool, but, for a brief hour, the sceptre of a King. On Twelfth-Night in far Scotland they never forgot to tell his story, and drink in silence to his memory. Another tale also they never wearied of telling; for, as a Greek said long ago: " Most sweet it is when one cloak shelters two lovers, and the tale of love is told by both."

THE END

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